

Make It Last: Of Trust and Friendship

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Summary: The State of Duran never believed in the Forerunners and disliked the formation of the Covenant. However, their defiance was going to come around and hit them hard somehow. Now a member of the Covenant, Katerina is working hard to keep her remaining family alive. Little did she know, she would find an unlikely friend in a certain Spartan.

1. Failure

****A/N: Hi, everyone! Ashleigh here and I finally get to dive into this story I've been waiting to do! ****

****So, as wild as my imagination is, I saw the Halo Legends short, "The Duel" and thus this happened. Months of planning and I'm ready to finally write this. Warning for the Chief being a little OOC at times! ****

****This story is from Katerina's POV, with the (almost) entire walkthrough of Halo 2 and 3. I hope you guys find her story interesting as she replaces Thel Vadam in this story!**

****So sit back and enjoy the (short) first chapter! :)****

Genre: Friendship/Romance/Angst/Action/Family****

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<p>Halo **â€œ** Katerina Duran - "Make It Last: Of Trust and Friendship"*****

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><p>Location: Council Chamber, High Charity
October
20****th****, 2552**

"You were right to focus your attention on the Flood, but this
demon, this 'Master Chief'â€|"

"By the time I knew of the demon's intent, there was nothing I could
do."

The sound of displeasure from the Council could almost deafen
Katerina Duran. Even so, she could hear the thumping of her own
heart. The Elite stood before the three High Prophets, her head low
and her fists clutched tightly, trying her hardest to draw out the
noises. How she wished she could just fade away right now.

To her right, not very far, stood the Brute Chieftain Tartarus, with
his massive arms across his chest. He chuckled audibly to himself, to
make sure Katerina could hear it. She narrowed her cat-like violet
eyes at him. _Watch itâ€|_

"You are one of our most treasured instruments," She glanced up at
that voice. The Prophet of Truth. Oh, how she often fantasized about
shutting that mouth up permanently. She would have to live long
enough to do it. "Long have you led your fleet with honor and
distinction. But your inability to safeguard Halo..."

Here it comesâ€|

"â€| Was a colossal failure."

"Noble Hierarch, I-"

Then she heard a new voice, one that came from an unknown direction.
"Nay! It was _heresy_!"

And the next thing she knew, a chorus of upset roars filled the
Council Chamber. This was bad. Really, really bad. Katerina knew that
and she was shaking. If the entire Council thinks that her failure
should be deemed as heresy, then this was going to be the end.

One last attempt. "Noble Hierarch, what I did was unforgivable, yes,
I admit to that. I failed to stop the demon! I failed to execute him!
But please, I beg of you, let me continue my campaign against the
humans!"

"No," She fell silent at Truth's bellow. "You will notâ€|"

Katerina witnessed him turning his head toward Tartarus and nodding
at the beast. With a single growl from him, two Brutes made their way
to her. She shrugged them off with a killer look. "_Do not touch
me_." She said in a hiss, turning her back on the Prophets, knowing
for sure that this was the end.

"Soon the Great Journey shall begin," As she made her way out with
those Brutes following her, she shut her eyes in great annoyance,
hoping to drown out the voice of the High Prophet. However his words
were soâ€| piercing. "But when it does, the weight of your heresy
will stay your feet," He made sure to pause just a little, and then
finish off with one last statement in a voice grimmer than usual.
"And you shall be left behind..."

She looked up and opened her eyes once more, but only to see where she was going. Without even glancing around, she could _feel _the satisfactory from most of the Council members. It felt sickening.

As she reached the main doors of the Council Chambers, she spotted the one Elite she was hoping to see before heading to her fate.

"Darâ€|" She said in a whisper.

Darius had the most dismayed expression known to anyone. Katerina could sense that her son wanted to stop all of this. Perhaps even grab his mother's hand and run off, judging by this stand. _Was it worth it, mother?_

She easily sensed that question, but she was still thinking about the answer, even as she exited the chamber.

2. Branded

****Halo ****â€"**** Katerina Duran - "Make It Last: Of Trust and Friendship"****

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><p>"I refuse to give in to their demands, Micah! I will not have this Clan bow down to those blind fools. We will continue staying the way we are, the way that keeps us happy."

"_Am I to assume you are coming with me when I have to meet with the Prophets once more, Katerina?" _

"_You are most certainly correct, darling. It's time to put an end to this. I do not wish for our Keep to be disturbed any longer."

—

Katerina Duran had her mind wrapped around a little memory while she continued to be escorted from the Council Chamber and to her unknown fate. With Tartarus still leading her, she felt even more uneasy. As if the words slipped out of her mouth, she asked, "What is going to happen to me?"

The Brute continued to walk, but he turned his head enough for her to view a sick smile on his face. "What happens to any traitor, little Kate."

He need not have to explain. She knew what it was, and it caused her stomach to almost drop. "I will _die _from the pain."

"Are you sure, little Kate?" Tartarus simply loved to add in the word 'little' in front to make her feel inferior. And so many times she had wanted to smack him for even calling her 'Kate' â€" a nickname only her husband would use, and she would _only _prefer her husband to use. "Taking into consideration how many times you have evaded death—"

"Tartarus, you know as well as I do that _this_ is inevitable. I just wish you would not draw your pleasures from my misfortunesâ€|"

"You chose your own fate, Katerina. You always have. How can I help it if I find it amusing?"

Katerina could easily pick up the delight in his tone. She was blazing at this moment, but somehow managed to keep her cool. "If somehow, somehow I were to survive this, then this is not over between you and I. We will engage in battle and only one of us will stand victorious."

Tartarus stopped in his tracks to, assumingly, open the door in front of them. Instead, he turned his full body to her and said one last statement. "See if you can stand tall after been branded first, little Kate."

* * *

><p>Location: Mausoleum of the Arbiter, High
Charity
October 20****th****, 2552**

â€|_nd tall. Stand tall. Stand tall. Stand tall.
Stan-_

Consciousness hit the female Elite hard and she only found herself repeating those words into her head beforeâ€| before that block of burning wood pierced her fragile skin at her upper left chest. The pain kicked in and she felt it. However, she could not reach for the scar as she was currently being carried away.

Blinking away the blurriness, she found herself over the shoulder of a regular Brute. She did not even have to take a sniff to smell Tartarus' presence as well. Great.

She wanted to speak but at that moment, she could not find her voice. Instead, she felt tears coming to her. The pain on her chest was driving her mad and all she remembered was the sound of her own cries before blacking out. As of now, all she could do was stare at the ground until it was her stop.

They headed down a small ramp and Katerina tried to make sense of the environment around her when they stopped. _Casketsâ€| and a lot of themâ€| _

"Noble Prophets of Truth and Mercy, I have brought the incompetent."

"You may leave, Tartarus. And take your Brutes with you."

She could not see the confused look on her foe's face. Instead, she was plopped onto the ground, her back connecting with the chilled floor. Letting go of a few coughs, she felt like she could finally breathe after everything that had transpired.

"Turn, Katerina."

Oh yeah. The Prophets. She had almost forgotten. Gathering the upper body strength was going to be challenging for that moment, but the last thing she wanted was to appear weak in front of the Prophets.

She sat up and turned around the best she could to face them, but she remained on the ground. Her trembling fingers ran over the Mark of Shame on her chest in a hesitate manner. She could not believe that it was _actually _embedded onto her skin.

"The Council has come to a conclusion, Katerina " you are to be hung by your entrails and your corpse paraded through the city," Truth casually related to her, making her cringe. "But ultimately, the terms of your execution are up to me!"

"Huh," A single short chuckle came to her. "It does not matter to me, Noble Hierarch. I was marked for death a long, _long _time ago." She said, barely able to lift her head up.

Truth had a rather unreadable expression, but Katerina could tell that he agreed with her on that sentence. "Indeed, Katerina. A very long time ago!" He let a few seconds past before asking, "Do you know where we are?"

"The Mausoleum of the Arbiter." She answered without hesitation, though she as still puzzled as to why she was even here. Even more so, why was she still alive?

Truth nodded at her. "Quite so, Katerina. Here rests the vanguard of the Great Journey. Every Arbiter, from first to last," He glanced around at the caskets. "Each one created and consumed in times of extraordinary crisis."

She then heard the Prophet of Mercy's voice cut in so she turned her head to him. "The Taming of the Hunters" the Grunt Rebellion - were it not for the Arbiters, the Covenant would have broken long ago!" He said with a fist to the arm of his hovering throne.

"Yes, I have heard many stories of these Arbiters and the things they have done to earn them at least an honorable death, Holy One," Katerina said. "But I do not understand " what does this have to do with me? I have destroyed our Sacred Ring. Why am I not put to death yet?"

Truth narrowed his eyes at her and she caught the faintest of smiles on his face. "While Halo's destruction was indeed, your error, Katerina, we know you are no heretic. You have given us yours and your Keep's loyalty to the Covenant," He then leaned against his hovering throne. "What I want you to see is the _true _face of heresy," He swiftly tapped a button of some sort on the arm of his chair and miniature hologram of an Elite in rather abnormal armor appeared. "One who would subvert our faith and incite rebellion against the High Council."

_Oh my". Sesa... _She thought to herself.

She silently braced herself before the hologram would speak. "Our Prophets are false! Open your eyes, my brothers! They would use the faith of our forefathers to bring ruin to us all! The Great Journey is a-"

However, before she could hear more, Truth quickly ended it. "You did what I had no confidence to do, Sesa!"

Truth now had a slight angered look on his face. "This heretic,

Katerina, and those who follow him, must be silenced. And you will ensure that happens."

"Their slander offends all who walk the Path!"

She was not even paying the slightest of attention to Mercy. "Butâ€| how will I, Noble Hierarch?" She questioned. "I have been stripped of my rank as Supreme Commander. I am no longer a leaderâ€|"

"Not as you are, Katerina., but as the Arbiter."

A large pod that, for some reason, Katerina did not notice in the first place, floated from the Prophets' side and towards the female Elite. The silver doors opened with a chill 'hiss' to reveal a suit of gray and ancient armor.

"And you shall be set loose against this heresy with our blessing." Truth then added.

The did not make sense. If the Council wanted her dead thenâ€| "Butâ€| but the Council, Holy Oneâ€|"

Mercy decided to step in this time. "The tasks you undertake as the Arbiter are perilous. Suicidal, even. You will die, Katerina, as each Arbiter in this chamber has before you. And the Council will have their corpse."

So it appears that she was not going to die immediately but instead, she would have to anticipate it. Somehow, it felt no different to her. Even since joining the Covenant, the countdown for her own death had begun.

However, if there as one thing Katerina Duran had learnt about herself over these past 30 years in service, was that she was hard to kill.

So if the Council wanted her corpse, they were going to have to wait for quite a while.

3. Healing

Halo **â€|**** Katerina Duran - "Make It Last: Of Trust and Friendship"**

* * *

><p>Location: Medical Chamber, High Charity
October 20****th****, 2552**

Katerina Duran stared into the tall mirror in front of her as she treated the Mark of Shame on her upper left chest. The darn thing was burning her smooth navy-blue skin and before she could even think of putting on the body suit and Arbiter armor, she just had to treat the burn scar first.

Once that was done, she let go of a much needed sigh, but she soon felt another sob coming to her. She would have never thought that it would come to this. She taught she had been careful and discreet.

But assisting the Spartan she encountered in blowing up Halo wasâ€¦ something that could _not_ be overlooked.

Katerina slowly but painful attached the black body suit to her body, careful not to agitate her wound. She stopped to rest a little more and to also curse herself and her current fate. Wellâ€¦ at least Darius was okay. At least he did not receive any punishment for her decision.

There was a gentle knock on the door of the medical chamber. "Leave me be!" She said in a loud tone, enough to act as a threat.

"I am afraid I cannot do that, mother. I am your son and I care about you very much."

Her teary violet cat-like eyes lit up at that. She almost stumbled out of her seat to open the door, and there stood her eldest son, Darius.

She let him enter and without any words, she found herself in a much needed hug. "Are you alright?" He asked in a soft tone.

Katerina nodded. "I am now," She said, pulling back. "At least nothing happened to you, Dar. That was my main concern."

"Are you _sure_ you are well?"

She hung her head low. No use hiding anything from her firstborn. "I never expected _this_, Dar. I am to live with this scar for the rest of my life. I so desperately wanted to disappear at that moment." She lowered herself onto the chair.

"The last thing you need to is an execution, mother. Come on. You are still here. We can still finish this," Darius said. "Our mission is to eliminate the Heretic Leader. This just might be the turning point we need."

Katerina glanced up at him. "Dar, it is not that simple. Perhaps we should have gone with him the moment Sesa renounced his faith in the Great Journey, but remember that our Keep was at stake. If we had left, Truth would send ships to our Keep and destroy whatever's left. And you know that the rest of your siblings are down there. We cannot risk it."

"30 years is more than enough pain, mother. I know you're out of endurance to handle it all," He said, reading right through her like glass. He walked up to her and knelt before her, taking one hand. "If we can just get a moment alone with Sesa, we can take the war to High Charity."

She smiled sweetly at him, running one hand past his jaw. "Your heart is in the right place, my boy, but you forget: Sesa has but a small army at his disposal. Even with our determination, we _cannot_ _face_ everything High Charity has to offer."

She then saw the disappointment in his apple-green eyes. Darius realized that his mother had a point. "If only the Prophets knew of what the Monitor had told me â€¦" about Halo's true purpose. I only wish we could inform them. They will _never_ _hear_ us out."

"True, darling. In their eyes, we are Heretics, here serving our punishmentâ€¦ all for my defianceâ€¦"

"No," Darius told her firmly, squeezing her hands. "Do not do this to yourself, mother. You _know _none of this is your fault."

"It will feel like that as long as Truth is alive."

* * *

><p>AN: A short chapter to make way for one of my favorite levels in Halo 2 "The Arbiter"! :)

>

>Past Logan - Yes, you're right! But she does not have Thel's background, as you can tell :)

4. The Arbiter

Halo **â€¦**** Katerina Duran - "Make It Last: Of Trust and Friendship"**

* * *

><p>Location: Gas Mine, Threshold
October 20****th****, 2552**

"When we joined the Covenant, we took an oath!"

_"According to our station! All without exception!" _

"On the blood of our fathers, on the blood of our sons...we swore to uphold the Covenant!"

_"Even to our dying breath!" _

With much disgust, Katerina Duran watched as her son stood amongst the Elites in his position as a Special Operations Sangheili, reciting the oath. He used to be under her command. Now that she was stripped of her rank, he was now under Rtas 'Vadumee. She knew Rtas for a long time. A true Sangheili in his own right, but a strong believer in the Great Journey and the Forerunners. Yet, if Katerina wanted Darius to be safe, he would be safe under Rtas' command.

"Those who would break this oath are Heretics, worthy of neither pity, nor mercy! Even now they use our lords' creations to broadcast their lies!"

_"We shall grind them into dust!" _

"And continue our march to glorious salvation!"

The Phantom she was in trembled as their destination was approaching. Katerina turned to her side to glance out of the window. An intense storm was swirling below the Forerunner structure known as Gas Mine, where the Heretic Leader, Sesa Refumee, was supposedly located.

She can still remember the day Sesa renounced his faith and requested

for Katerina and Darius to come with him and his Heretics, since he knew of her beliefs. However, she could not leave High Charity without damaging the Duran Keep's safety. That was the last thing she wanted.

"This armor suits you, Katerina," Rtas interrupted her thoughts and she turned her head to him. "But it cannot hide that mark."

Female Sangheili had very different facial features from the males. The females had a very humanoid appearance - perfectly chiseled cheeks, eyes slightly wider apart than typical and a flat nose. This was in contrast to the males, where all they had were two sets of mandibles attached to the face.

So if she wanted to produce a faked smile, it would _look _like a smile. "I am afraid nothing ever will, Rtas."

He let a few silent seconds go by to show his compassion for her. "You are now the Arbiter, Katerina. The will of the Prophets," He turned his head briefly behind him, to his party. "However these are _my_ Elites. Their lives matter to me. Yours does not."

As if she was expecting that, she shot back with, "That makes two of us then, Rtas."

He could only reply with a highly respectful, "Hmmm..."

The Phantoms dropped the units off and resumed their flight. Katerina shielded her eyes at the storm that was brewing. This storm was surely going to swallow this facility.

"Onward!" She heard her son order. As a Special Operations Sangheili, he was the one in charge on the battlefield. The unit made their way down a nearby ramp and to a locked airlock. They waited patiently until an Elite decrypted it.

"The storm has masked our approach, and it should have their local battle-net in disarray. We have the element of surprise... for now." She heard Rtas' voice over the channel. So perhaps the storm was at their advantage for now.

The airlock opened with a hiss and the Elites and Grunts piled in. The door shut behind them and they were faced with yet, another airlock, that lead to the interior of the facility.

"Engage Active camouflage!" Darius said. "You are to reveal yourselves only after the Arbiter has joined battle with the enemy!"

She gave him a little smile at that, in hopes to make him feel a little better about the whole situation. Her attempts were in vain; Darius was too upset about his mother's fate.

"You may wish to do the same, Arbiter," Rtas opened a private channel to the female Elite. "But take heed: your armor's system is not as...advanced as ours. Your camouflage will not last forever."

_Simply perfect! How am I to effectively stealth like this? _

All her comrades activated their camouflage and blended in. The smart thing would be to assess the situation before she could even think about doing anything. She stuck close to the wall, anticipating for the airlock to open.

Once it did, her comrades entered with the quietest of steps. Darius waited until his unit went in first. It was so he could stand right at the doorway and see all without being seen himself.

Darius gave his mother a nod.

_Either no Heretics, or they have their backs turned. _

Taking a breath, she peered past the doorway, tiptoed over to a nearby short square-ish pillar and stuck close to it. She glanced up: a walkway, with two ramps attached to each side. On her level, there was two Heretic Elites directly in front of her with their backs turned, as well as four sleeping Grunts.

"Any word on our missing brothers?"

"Still nothing. Given what we have learned, I fear they are lost."

"Maybe the Oracle will protect us..."

"Perhaps. But his Sentinels are too few. Better we protect ourselves!"

With her back still glued to the pillar, she turned her head away in shock. _The Monitor is here? It can't be!_

No time. She needed to get rid of these Elites and Grunts before anybody would appear at the walkway. Inhaling deeply, she triggered her Active Camo and unleashed her Wrist Blades attached to the top of both her wrists.

The Wrist Blades were perfect for not only stealth, but also in close-quarter situations. Though Katerina was a fan of using stealth, it did not mean that she was not dangerous up close. She just preferred not leaving a big mess around, that's all.

With a swift push and a faint apology on her lips, she stabbed the two Elites in the back of their necks, which resulted in voiceless cries. The sleeping Grunts did not hear a damn thing.

She pulled out the blades and it sent an uneasy chill down her spine. Every fiber of her hated what she was made to do at this moment. She really hoped that she could get a moment alone with Sesa and sort things out.

She thought about this as she drove her Wrist Blades into the four Grunts one by one and up the walkway.

Darius' unit was meant to stay there, near the airlock and there has no choice. The Arbiter was meant to _die _so having Katerina to do all the work was unfortunate. If she could just keep up her stealth tactic, she would not have to worry about getting shot at.

However, just by peering over the walkway, she realized that that was

going to be a bit of a problem.

At least a dozen Heretic Elites and Grunts were stationed, patrolling their area. Even the Grunts were wide awake. There was no way to sneak and attack without raising an alarm.

Katerina turned her head back to her son and shook it. _Too many of them. _

Darius acknowledged that with a little nod.

Katerina returned her gaze forward and pulled out two Plasma Rifles from their holsters attached to the side of her thighs. It was time for Darius and his unit to join in.

She lifted the rifles up high, aimed, and fired.

* * *

><p>AN: Apologizes if it's been a while. School's been unkind
D: In a month, my National Exams will end and I can give my full
attention to this fic :) **

**And as you can tell, the appearance I gave the female Elites in this story is similar to the one in the Halo Legends short, "The Duel". I honestly thought that that appearance was perfect for the females so I decided to keep it that way in here, even though in the novels, the females are similar to the males :) **

5. Fear

Halo **â€"**** Katerina Duran - "Make It Last: Of Trust and Friendship" **

* * *

><p>Location: Gas Mine, Threshold
October 20****th****,
2552**

Banshees. Katerina Duran did not like them very much. First of all, she had trouble mastering it. Second of all, she would become dizzy after each flight.

So it certainly did not help that she needed to destabilize the Heretics' air forces. It was so that Rtas Vadumee's Phantom, carrying the unit she had been with all this time, could land on a different part of the facility, where the Heretic Leader was supposedly at after tracking him all this time.

Katerina managed to (ungracefully) land her trampled Banshee on the landing zone after clearing it of all Heretics. She pulled herself out of the wrecked air vehicle and leaned against a pillar. "Ooooh, my poor headâ€| I am seeing stars!" She whimpered, unable to shake the dizziness off. Thankfully, Rtas and his party had not landed yet to see her in this state.

Once her head stopped spinning, she glanced around â€" there lied an airlock which led to the interior. Yet, she was also surrounded by the bodies of Heretic Grunts and Elites. A wave of guilt washed over

her at the sight.

"I am so sorry. I hope all of you know I ever meant for any of this to happen. I am simply not strong enough to rebel like you all. I do not have the strength anymoreâ€|"

The next thing she knew, a vigorous gust of wind stuck her Banshee and sent it to the direction of the storm below her. She could only widen her bright violet cat-like eyes at that. It happened in a blink of an eye; she would have missed it if she was not looking at it. "Quite honestly, considering everything that has transpired so far, I would rather be that Bansheeâ€|"

She patiently waited for the Phantom to drop off its Grunts and Elites. The minute Darius Duran was dropped off and his mother stood there in front of him, he hurried over to hug her tightly, almost lifting her off the ground.

"Thank goodness you are safe!" Darius said in delight. "I know how much you dislike flying a Banshee."

Katerina managed to let go of a few giggles. "Well I made it, darling," She then pulled back to look at him. "Now we can continue on."

* * *

><p>Two Special Ops Elites, one of them being Darius, quickly cover the entrance as soon as the airlock opened up. Special Ops Grunts file in, followed by the two Elites, and then it was Rtas and Katerina's turn.<p>

Katerina almost bumped into Rtas when he abruptly stopped in his tracks to sniff the air. "Rtas? What is it?" She questioned.

"That stench," He said in a grim tone. "I have smelt it beforeâ€|"

_Stench? _ She herself decided to take a small whiffâ€| and she almost gagged. There was only one thing that could give off a smell _that _bad. And she had never wanted to run into it ever again.

Oh no. No, no, no, no, no, noâ€| She immediately felt her heart drop to her stomach. Perhaps even lower. She thought the nightmare ended onboard the Pillar of Autumn. Looks like it managed to follow her all the way here.

The unit proceeded to a small room, where a large tank containing some tiny, fleshy lifeforms greeted them. One of the Grunts made a disgusted sound upon viewing it. They exit the area via the next doorway, and that lead them another small room, but this one had a unique feature: the floor was transparent. Through it, they could see the shadows of two forces battling. The familial sound of the screeches and gargled moans made it obvious as to who one of the two was.

Just hearing the sounds made Katerina shudder.

The doorway led them what appeared to be a laboratory this time. The floor was strewn with deformed corpses.

"What happened here?" The other Special Operations Elite questioned aloud.

Katerina and Darius could only exchange glances of revulsion with each other.

"Me have bad feeling about this..." One of the two Spec Ops Grunts murmured.

"You always have bad feeling! You had bad feeling about this morning food nipple!" The other one replied.

If the situation was not so perilous and nauseating to Katerina, she could have at least cracked a smile. Grunts always made her laugh.

"See! Heretic Leader!"

"What?!" Katerina spun around, her hands on the Plasma Rifles that were in the holsters attached to the side of her thighs.

Sesa Refumee!

The Grunt fired at him, as he levitated a few feet above the ground. However, the bolts went right _through _him.

"Hold your fire!" Rtas said sternly. "It is a holodrone."

'Sesa' turned his attention to Katerina, who had already made her way to him. "Katerina Duran. Of all the ones the Prophets sent to silence me. An Arbiter too, nonetheless. Never would you ever be in that position if you had come with us, Katerina."

"I-" No. Now was the wrong time to discuss this. "Youâ€| areâ€| a Heretic, Sesa, and you must be silencedâ€|" Her voice itself made it so clear how she forced herself to say it.

"A holodrone means that he is close," Rtas pointed his Energy Sword at the hologram. "Come out, so we may kill you!"

Sesa let go of a few evil laughs at that. "Get in line."

The hologram then brusquely vanished, leaving nothing but the empty holodrone and a disappointed Katerina.

Just then, she caught something in the corner of her eye - familiar spherical creaturesâ€| Flood Infection Forms!

"Leader!"

"Stand firm! The Flood is upon us!"

Katerina pulled out her two Plasma Rifles immediately and held her breath. _No, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, n-_

"Destroy the bodies!" She heard Rtas yell in the midst of all the plasma bolts flying and the Energy Swords swishing. "Do _not _let the Infection Forms reanimate them!"

_Easier said than done! _Katerina made sure her hits were precise, not wanting to waste any bolts on the Infection Forms, but those things were fast!

Soon, she found the assault subsiding and it allowed her to breathe a little. However, it did not stop her heart from beating like a drum. The fearâ€¦ it was going to take over her.

"Katerina," She heard Rtas' call and found him at the now opened doorway. "Proceed forward. We will follow once the reinforcements arrive."

Now her heart was going to stop beating entirely. _You want me to go? Alone? Have you lost your_

However, she had no choice. It was an order she had to carry out. "Yes, Commander."

She jogged past the doorway and into a really large elevator. It would most likely take her to the lower levels of thisâ€¦ laboratory? Perhaps that was what this was. This elevator had a short spiral stairway right in the middle.

She walked over and waited for the airlock door to close so that she could proceed deeper into the laboratory. The Elite at the doorway was none other than her son.

"Stay safe, mother. Watch your back." Darius told her, not liking this one bit.

"And you, my boy." She said with little to no confidence in herself.

The airlock shut to a close.

Katerina was alone again, but not for long, once she heard the shrieks of Flood Combat Forms piercing the air.

6. Juggernaut

Halo **â€œ**** Katerina Duran - "Make It Last: Of Trust and Friendship"**

* * *

><p>Location: Laboratory, Gas Mine, Threshold
October 20****th****, 2552**

Katerina Duran made sure her clutch on her one Plasma Rifle was tight. Waiting in mind-wrecking suspense for her those Flood Combat Forms to pop up, she was taking in deep breaths. Even the elevator had started to descend, but at the speed of a snail and producing such eerie sounds as it did. One would think that that would draw the attention of the Flood easily.

They sure were taking their sweet time to attack the lonely Katerina.

"I am not afraid. I am not afraid. I beat them once before, I can do

it again. I am not afraid. I am not-"

Then, a single shriek shattered the air.

"Alright, I AM AFRAID!" She lowered her head in an instant, covering it with the rifle. "I AM VERY AFRAID!"

But nothing happened.

She attempted to catch her breath. "Alright, this is getting annoying! Where are you, you dreadful abominations?!"

She crooked her head left, right, up and down, waiting for the attack.

Then her sharp ears picked up the shriek once again " this time, from above.

And sure enough, a Flood Combat Form came crashing down from above, almost scaring the life out of Katerina. "OH GOODNESS!"

The Elite Combat Form squawked at her and charged towards her with its claw stretched out to her. Katerina hurried and fired a few bolts at it, slowing it down but not enough to kill it.

She swung her foot at it, causing it to stagger, and made sure that her next plasma bolts would strike at the center of its chest. It fell instantly.

Katerina took the time to catch her breath, but she knew it was not over. More will sure to come.

So she put her Plasma Rifle back on its holster and instead, wielded two Energy Swords. And then she waited.

* * *

><p>Location: Lower Laboratories

A dozen Elite Combat Forms and a few Sentinels later, the elevator came to a stop. Katerina was now that the lower parts of this vast laboratory, with one of her Energy Swords out of battery. She was going to make do with one other sword and her Plasma Rifle, which she would have to discard soon. Well, no worries. These Combat Forms could wield weapons. She would simply have to pick up a fallen one.

Getting off the elevator of doom, she found herself strolling down a hallway, passing by a great number of Heretic Grunt and Elite corpses, as well as Flood-infected ones. There were a few weapons lying around, so she quickly picked up a Needler and wielded in her right hand, with her Plasma Rifle in her left, and her lone Energy Sword attached to the side of her hip.

Taking a left turn, she was greeted with a series of large windows and the familiar noises of a battle transpiring. Specifically, the Heretics and the Flood.

Sure enough, she peeped through a window and found them going at it. As usual, the Flood was ruthless, the Elites stood their ground

fearlessly and the Grunts ran up and down in sheer fear.

Katerina backed away from the window. "Perhaps I should let themâ€¦ sort out their differencesâ€¦"

No sooner had she said that, the window she had been gazing out of shattered to a million pieces, giving her a great scare.

She then realized that all was silent in the lower laboratories. Glancing through the busted window, she found that the Elite Combat Forms were victorious. Not wanting to waste time, standing at the ledge itself she fired plasma bolts and needles at the nearest enemies first, before making the jump to their level.

It was only then it dawned upon her that there were about half a dozen Elite Combat Forms. The pink needles exploding on the nearest two Combat Forms were slowing them down a little, giving her time to react quicker with her Plasma Rifle.

Suddenly, her Plasma Rifle powered down and no longer had its blue glow â€" no more plasma bolts!

"Oh no!" Yet, with quick thinking, she used the weapon to smack the oncoming third Elite Combat Form in the face (if that _was _even the face the first place), drop the weapon and unleash her wrist blade. She gave it a massive slash across the chest and it fell backward with a gargle.

To the other three oncoming hostiles, with some of them firing their weapons at her, Katerina had to rely on her Needler, her kicks and her wrist blade. The armor's shields were doing a marvelous job, thank goodness, easily stopping any shots.

She swung her Needler at the last Combat Form and drove her wrist blade into the center of its chest. Pushing it off with her foot, she was relieved to be able to get a moment to breathe, even though the atmosphere was still very much ominous. She sheathed the wrist blade and proceeded to reload the Needler with a new round she found on the ground. She also came across a Plasma Rifle with a good 74% of its battery left. Smiling to herself, she picked it up.

There were only two airlocks on this level; one on each end of the room. The one that was unlocked was on the other side. She was about to move forward when suddenlyâ€¦ a 'thump' halted her in her tracks.

Those thumps were getting closer and louder. She did not want to find out what it was so she pressed forward, only to stop again once she realized what caused those thumps.

Something was standing on the ledge to her right. She caught sight of it, wished she had not, and froze in place out of sheer terror. Her stomach was in knots right then and there and knew that what she was seeing at the moment could not be unseen. She wanted so desperately to look away perhaps even make it to the unlocked door, but she could not â€" this premonition of fright would not let her move. Neither would it let her speak.

The creature leaned forward and landed right in front of her, giving her a full view of her newest enemy. This thingâ€¦ was massive. It

must have been _at least_ 18-feet tall, making the poor 6 feet and 8 inch Katerina break a cold sweat instantly, just by the height. Its body consisted of a spherical-like center made of Flood biomass, with tall legs possibly capable of making jumps and two immensely large and lengthy tentacles with pointed ends for arms.

Those arms could very well send her flying through any of these walls. Like a juggernaut? A juggernaut was a force will crush anything in its path. So considering its arms it was an appropriate name to give. Yet, _how_ could an infection create something as horrific as _this? _Katerina's heart could very well give out.

Well, it was either her or the Juggernaut. _Shake the fear off, Kate! You must! Survive this for Darius! _

The creature took the smallest of steps (if possible) towards her. That immediately prompted her to turn around and run towards the locked airlock, screaming her lungs out.

The door refused to open and she heard the Juggernaut coming at her. Spinning around, it took a mere two steps to reach her. It was about to drive its pointed tentacle into her when she made the quick decision to roll to her left.

The Juggernaut's tentacle missed and got caught in the wall instead. Katerina took the opportunity to fire all needles and plasma bolts at it. 7 or more Needler rounds connected with the massive creature and exploded, causing it to moan in pain. She kept it up as she backed away and towards the unlocked airlock instead.

Out of the blue, she was thrown forward after the Juggernaut was free and swung its tentacle at her. The force was so powerful that she lost possession of her Plasma Rifle and Needler and landed on the other end of the room, right next to the unlock airlock.

There was no way the Juggernaut could follow her and exit the lab. The airlock was way too small for it. However, Katerina was unable to even get up and make a run for it after that throw. With a pained grunt, she sat up to face the Juggernaut. "Not like this. _Not _like this! All big things fall down! You _must _have a weakness!" She declared as she struggled to her feet, pain gnawing at her left leg.

As if the Juggernaut was taunting her, it replied with what sounded like an attempted shriek.

This was quickly followed by another attempted stab. This time, the female Elite rolled forward, brandished one Energy Sword in the midst, and severed one of its legs.

The evolved creature let go of a loud groan and got to its other knee. With its body on her level, Katerina put all of her might into driving the Energy Sword into the Juggernaut. When she sensed that it was going to try to whack her again, she swiftly pulled out the sword to sever one tentacle.

Then, she realized that her earlier stab caused a great opening in the Juggernaut's body. With quick thinking, she brought out a plasma grenade, activated it and stuck it into that wound. And despite her

left leg hurting, she made sure to run like a bat out of hell, far, far away from the Juggernaut. She took cover behind a weapons cache that the Heretics had brought in.

****KABOOM!****

The explosion caused the ground to rumble, but thankfully, Katerina was a safe distance from the Juggernaut and did not obtain any further injuries. She timidly peered over the weapons cache to see what had become of the Juggernaut â€" a large portion of its center had blown off.

Nonetheless, the threat had been eradicated.

Perhaps stopping to catch her breath was a bad idea at the moment. She had better get to that unlocked airlock and make her escape.

"_Arbiter? Arbiter, are you still there?"_

So nice of Rtas to finally call in. As the airlock opened up, she found herself on the exterior of this part of the station. The storm was really getting violent now. Her waist-length glossy black hair was flying everywhere. Directly in front of her, more Flood forms were battling more Heretics, and then a Phantom swooped in to provide reinforcements and covering fire.

_Oh, thank goodnessâ€| _"Yes, Rtas, I am here." She said breathlessly.

"_We lost your signal after you disappeared deeper into the facility. The Flood has spread throughout the station! We don't have enough troops to manage such a large infestation!" _

"The Heretic Leader must be somewhere in there! Give me a little more time to find him!" She requested, then falling to her knees once the pain in her left leg _really _sunk in.

"Mother!" _Darius? He is alright? _Looking up, she found him running towards her in hysteria.

"Darâ€|" She stretched out one hand towards him. Darius took that hand and made sure he hugged her tightly. "I am _so _glad you are safe!"

"I had feared for the worst when we lost your signal," He told her, the happiness that his mother was still alive so rich in his tone. "I know how you feel about the Flood."

"You would not believe what I had encountered. I wish I could tell you," With his help, she got to her feet, slowly but painfully. "Ow, but I have a mission to complete."

"Are you injured?" Darius questioned with much concern.

"You can thank the hideous thing I encountered for that," She said, flexing her leg. "Ugh, but if I can just get a moment alone with Sesa, perhaps we can turn things around."

"If the certain situation we are in can allow you to,"

"Flood or not," She unsheathed one Energy Sword. "I will succeed. Let us press forward, Dar."

* * *

><p>AN: Yep, the Juggernaut! I certainly wished that Bungie hadn't cut them because I think they would have been awesome to battle! It would have been a great challenge, no doubt!

>

**So I decided to put the Juggernaut in this story instead :)
**

7. The Oracle

Halo **â€œ**** Katerina Duran - "Make It Last: Of Trust and Friendship"**

* * *

><p>Location: Heart of the Station, Gas Mine,
Threshold
October 20****th****, 2552**

"Heretic boss! You see? You see?"

Despite the sharp pain in her left leg, Katerina tried her hardest to reach to him as the Heretic Leader made tracks for a door.
"Sesa!"

Sesa 'Refumee turned his head for a second to see Katerina, as well as Spec Ops Elites and Grunts coming for him but continued for the door. Once he was passed it, it did not close shut. Instead, the doorway was shielded with hard light.

Katerina pounded her fists against the hard light. "Wait!"

Sesa tilted his head at her and simply said, "You had a chance, Katerina."

And the doors shut.

With a heavy sigh, she hung her head, turned around and slid down the hard light in despair, massaging her left thigh.

"Arbiter!" Rtas Vadamee jogged up to her, eyeing the door shielded by the hard light. "Where is he?"

"Locked himself in there, behind this door," She answered as Darius hurried to her with much concern. "Presumably to escape the oncoming storm."

"Stinking floodbaitâ€œ|" He muttered under his breath. "We will _never_ break through this!"

It was then that Katerina took notice of a giant hologram right in the center of this part of the station. The hologram was projecting a 3D model of the entire station, Gas Mine. She also realized that 3

cables were holding the station in place.

A light bulb went over her head. Perhaps a little persuasion will make him listen to what she had to say.

"Not necessarilyâ€¦" She said aloud as she got to her feet, her violet eyes still on the model. "Commander, get everyone back to the ships. I am going to draw the Leader out of his hole."

Rtas turned his head to her in confusion. "But how?"

She then pointed at the model. "The cable. I am going to cut it. If I do, he will want to escape, which means he will run. Then I may track him and finish him off. But I cannot do that if we have allies here; it will bring them great harm."

Darius only stood there behind his mother, gaping.

As for Rtas, he took a quick moment to comprehend her words and nodded in understanding, respecting her wish. "Warriors, return to the landing zone! The Arbiter is going to continue upward, cut this station loose and scare the Heretic from his hole!"

The remaining Spec Ops Elites and Grunts all had shocked expressions. They obeyed their commander and began to exit, not without hearing phrases like "May our Lords guide you" or even "We shall not forget your sacrifice" from the Elites. She gave them all a half but faked smile.

Rtas began to make his own move, not without telling Darius, "Give your wishes to your mother and then hurry, brother. We will be waiting."

Katerina turned back to her son, with an expression that said so many things to Darius. "I had a feeling about thisâ€¦ It is a perfect plan, mother. You draw out Sesa and you get to speak to him all alone."

She acknowledged with one nod. "Exactly, my boy. In the end, it will only be me and Sesa, and he can listen to what I have to say. Perhaps he will even accept my alliance."

"Mother?"

"Yes, Dar. Getting branded was the last straw. I am done. Let us escape and join Sesa," She said with a smile, squeezing his shoulder. "I speak to him, sort it all out and we will escape High Charity."

And Darius could not be happier to hear that. "It will be done then, mother. Just say the word."

"I will. Now go," She instructed with a soft pat on his left pair of mandibles. "Your mother will be alright, even against the Flood."

* * *

><p>A quick elevator ride and Katerina was on the exterior of the station, where the 3 cables were located. In the midst of all of the awful Flood forms coming for her as well as the Sentinels, she

managed to leave them all dead, sever the 3 cables, and the entire station began to plummet through the air.<p>

Following a Banshee chase, she found herself at where she had begun " the part of the station with the Seraph Fighter. It was powerful enough to withstand the storm so that was where the Heretic Leader was going to. So was Katerina.

"Sesa, stop!"

Sesa paused for a brief moment before turning his head behind. "Katerina." He kept his twin Plasma Rifles in hand though Katerina drew none. "I would rather die by your hands than let the Prophets lead me to slaughter."

"No one is getting led to the slaughter, Sesa, and neither am I laying a hand on you," She declared in a strict tone. "I needed an excuse to pull you out of your little hiding place and speak to you and that is what I will do."

"Speak to me? About what, Katerina?" He took a few slow steps towards her, to which she stood her ground. "Do you wish to join our cause _now_? Well, I am afraid it is too little too late," He took a sarcastic tone and it showed how he was not amused one bit. "You seem to have let our hideout plummet through the air!"

"Sesa-"

"And let us not forget the countless men you killed!"

"Sesa, I had _no choice_!" She cried out. "The Prophets! Truth " he would have eradicated whatever was left of my Keep! My State! _How _can you expect me to put them in so much danger?"

Sesa chuckled evilly. "That is not possible, Katerina " the day you decided to call the Journey a lie was the day your State fell in danger" | "

Her violet eyes widened at that remark. "You hypocritical _bastard._ YOU still believed in the Great Journey back then! I never believed in it since I was 15! I moved to a State and Keep who shared the same belief and dislike for the Covenant! Whatever it was that caused your change of heart-"

Katerina swallowed her words when she picked up what sounded like " humming. She glanced up and immediately, her jaw dropped.

A familiar humming is heard. The Arbiter looks up and sees 343 Guilty Spark descending from above.

"Hello! I am 343 Guilty Spark. I am the Monitor of Installation 04!"

The floating round-edged cube with a single blue eye. Yep. That was Spark alright. The same one her son Darius encountered on Halo in the Library, as well as by Katerina onboard the _Pillar of Autumn_.

"Ask the Oracle about Halo!" Sesa told her, clutching his fist tightly in anger. "How they would sacrifice us all for _nothing_!"

"No need for that, Sesa," She kept her eye on Guilty Spark. "Darius already had an encounter with the Monitor and I know _everything_â€|"

"Excellent," A sudden kick and Katerina was sent flying before landing on her back.

She glanced at him in utter horror. "Sesa!" She watched as he used his jetpack to land atop of the Seraph fighter and pulled out two little spherical objects. She got to her feet, pulling out twin Needlers.

"Then you can _die _knowing that your belief was not false at allâ€|" Sesa unclutched his fists that the objects, turning out to be holodrones, float in the air and immediately shift intoâ€| into holograms of Sesa himself.

_Oh no. _Katerina did not take her fingers off the trigger. It appeared that only one of them was going to leave this falling facility alive.

* * *

><p>AN: A little chapter before Kate kicks the Leader's butt!

>

8. To The End

Halo **â€"**** Katerina Duran - "Make It Last: Of Trust and Friendship"**

* * *

><p>Location: Heart of the Station, Gas Mine,
Threshold
October 20****th****, 2552**

"Sesa, this is _insanity_! I am _not _your enemy!"

Katerina wondered if her pleas could even be heard above the noises caused by plasma bolts connecting with the pillar she was hiding behind. She could not go left or right because of the two holographic versions of him firing at her, immobilizing her.

"Only _one _of us will leave this facility, Katerina! Come out so I may kill you!"

She cursed in Sangheilli, though the bolts drowned out what she was saying. It was all or nothing at this point and she knew it.

So she turned to her left and started to fire the shots from both Needlers. The two holodrones were stationed on her left and right, equipped with their jet packs, so accuracy proved to be challenging. However, that was the beauty of Needler rounds. She did not let go of the trigger as she ran towards them, despite the pain in her left leg.

The Seraph Fighter was still in the hanger bay with the real Sesa and

the monitor, 343 Guilty Spark still atop of it, watching Katerina's every move. She knew for a fact that Sesa was simply waiting for the perfect moment to step in and finish Katerina off so she had to be cautious of him as well. This was all too overwhelming!

The needle rounds were proving to be effective against the holodrones; just a little more and they would go offline. She needed to finish this fast.

So even with the sharp pain in her left thigh, she kept her eye on the one holodrone that was closer to the ground, jumped and ran her wrist blade across it. It shifted and the holodrone fell to the ground, going offline.

When Katerina landed back on her good foot, she spun around with a plasma grenade in hand and tossed it at the second holodrone, hoping to distract it. As luck would have it, it stuck!

Following the explosion, it was time for the real Heretic Leader to get to work and finish off this female Sangheili. He fired his twin Plasma Rifle at her and it connected with every hit. Knowing her shields could not take anymore, she turned and ran for the nearest pillar.

"What is wrong, Katerina?" The bolts stopped and she could hear his voice clearly. He was still a distance away. "Unable to take anymore?" He taunted with the cruelest of voices as he landed on the same level as Katerina, leaving Spark atop of the Seraph Fighter. "Your resilience was bound to fall apart some time, dear! Once again, you had a chance to leave and you chose not to. Why did you not? Why do you think you can honestly save what little is left back on the State of Duran? After all, you caused its current state!"

That was it.

She felt as if she had lost all control when she emerged from the pillar to fire all the rounds left in the magazines. While Sesa thought he could escape the needles by ascending, the needler round proved to be much faster and they effectively took down his shields, as well as hindering his ability to fly higher.

Katerina took his chance to put at least three more needler rounds into him, cracking his armor's chest plate as well as his skin. Falling to his knees, he knew that this was the end. Katerina knew it from his chuckle.

"It appears that you have won, Katerina!" He said in little pained sniggers, pulling out one of the needler rounds, tipped with his blood.

"I did not win a damned thing, Sesa!" She shot back, walking up to him. "Now look what you have made me do to you!" Katerina whined, dropping both the Needlers. "How many times do I have to tell you that I had no choice but to stay with the Covenant?! You may not have considered the consequences, but I did!"

"Lies!" He glanced up at her, one hand on his chest and the other one the ground in an attempt to stabilize himself. "If you had, you would not even be in this position!"

The color drained from her face right then.

"If you had not called the Great Journey a lie all those years ago, in front of the Prophets, your entire State would not have been eradicated!" He stopped to spit out blood and catch his breath, prompting Katerina to hurry to him and grab him before he could fall backwards.

"How was I to know that Truth would give me such a cruel punishment?" She told him, but then realization came over her. "No! no I _was _to know! I should have known!"

"And that! is why you are here."

She locked her gaze with his.

"Perhaps there is still some hope for you, Katerina. Do what you must to live, but you _must _take down all of the Prophets for spinning lies to the rest of the Covenant!"

She struggled, but managed to give a nod. "I will."

And Sesa laid his head back with a heavy sigh.

Immediately, a wave of guilt and shame washed over her. She whispered her apologies over and over again as she laid is body on the ground. She never took her eyes off him as she stood up.

"Unfortunate," She was taken away from her thoughts to face the Monitor, whom she almost forget about considering the situation. "His edification was most enjoyable."

Katerina took a moment to study Spark before saying, "Monitor, my name is Katerina Duran. You encountered my son, Darius, and his unit back on Halo, at the Library, You were bringing them to obtain the Index? You spoke of many things about Halo, about the Forerunners, about the Flood. Tell me: is it true? What Halo's true purpose is?"

"Why, yes!" Came an exultant reply. "My creators created Halo for the sole purpose of eliminating the Flood. Once activated, Halo will " ooohhh myyyyyy!"

All of a sudden, Spark was being dragged away by some unseen force, completely baffling the female Elite.

"Monitor, hang on!" She called out, running for him.

She stopped dead in her tracks when she discovered the cause of it. Spark was now attached to the end of the Fist of Rukt, the gravity hammer of Tartarus.

Oh hell. It's Tartarus.

She had not even realized that there was a Phantom at the hanger bay's doors. "Tartarus, have you lost it?! _That _is the Mon- I mean the Oracle!"

Tartarus pulled off Spark and tossed him into the Phantom's Gravity

Lift behind him casually. "So it is," He said indifferently. "Come. We are leaving this system."

9. The Index

Halo **â€"**** Katerina Duran - "Make It Last: Of Trust and Friendship"**

* * *

><p>Location: Katerina's Private Chambers, High
Charity
October 20****th****, 2552**

"This should have been treated a while ago,"

Katerina Duran winced in pain, shutting just one eye tightly as she drew her breath in a long hiss. "The pain was manageable, Dar. Really."

"_Of course_ it was," Darius said with just a hint of sarcasm, enough for his mother to detect it. "You know, sometimes I believe that you are too stubborn for your own good. You should care more about your safety." He told her strictly yet lovingly as he massaged her left leg.

She smiled sweetly and tilted her head at him. "I have you to do that for me, do I not?"

He snorted a laugh at that though. "If only I could accompany you in your missions, then yes," He kept his full concentration on her thigh. "So tell me, mother â€" the creature you encountered within the facility's laboratories that did this to you? What was it?"

Katerina heaved a great sigh. "I amâ€| not even sure myself, dear. It was justâ€| _so _tall and frightening. I had _no idea _an infection could create something like that," She then gazed into the distance, to recall the Juggernaut and its appearance. "It was twice as tall and I was. Terribly long legs and two tentacles that sent me flying and thus this pain in my leg- ow!"

"Sorry," He quickly apologized, resuming his massage.

"Ah, no worries, dear."

"How did you kill it?" He questioned inquisitively.

"Severed one of its legs and wedged a grenade into an opening I gave it. Killed it instantly," She said. "I justâ€| never want to experience something so horrifying ever again, Dar. My heart was ready to give out at the sight of that thing," She clutched her heart in response. "I do not think I will ever dispose of this fear of the Floodâ€|"

Darius reached out to squeeze her upper left arm comfortingly. "Who could blame you, mother? Considering what happened to-" He stopped himself from continuing any further, for his mother's sake.

However, Katerina decided to finish it. "To Versera?"

Apple-green cat-like eyes widened at her.

"Perhaps theâ€¦ incident with him further accelerated my fear of the Flood, yes. I justâ€¦" The female Sangheili halted to close her eyes and take in a deep breath. "I just often wonderâ€¦ if he suffered greatly." She said, hanging her head.

Darius did not say a word. He just simply took his mother's hand into his.

* * *

><p>Location: Katerina's Private Chambers, High
Charity
November 3****rd****, 2552**

"The Prophets summoned you? For what reason?"

"I do not know, my dear. But for whatever reason it is for, it has to be an Arbiter's duty." Katerina replied, combing out the knots in her glossy, raven-black waist-lengthen hair.

She was looking into the tall mirror as she did this, with Darius standing behind her. As she spoke, he caught sight of a smirk on her lips. "And you can say that with a smile on your face."

The smirk blew into a grin. "Well, with news such as the one we had received yesterday, how can I _not _smile?"

To that, Darius could not stop the chuckles that were coming to him. "I can understand that: one of the Prophets is dead."

"I have always wanted to shut Regret up myself - by shoving my sword through his gullet," Once she got out all of the knots, she turned her body to Darius. "But I am not complaining."

"So it is just Mercy and Truth who are left."

"Yes. Mercy, well, I am not too sure how to deal with him. Perhaps we could wait it out and let his age take care of it. As for Truthâ€¦"

"Face-to-face. I understand." He folded his arms across his chest.

"It _is _personal between him and our State," She said. "And I know that murdering him will not bring backâ€¦ all that we have lost but it will ease the pain a little." Heaving a sigh, she got to her feet, dressed in her black body suit. "Darling, could you hand me my shawl?"

"Of course." From the table behind him, he grabbed the bright purple shawl and handed it to his mother.

"Thank you, Dar," Fanning it out, she draped it over her shoulders and pinned it in place with her brooch, which bore the insignia of the State of Duran, a ten-sided star. "After all these years. The shawl and the brooch still stay strong."

* * *

><p>Location: Sanctum of the Hierarchs, High
Charity

During Katerina's journey to the Sanctum of the Hierarchs, she noticedâ€| something new â€" The Jiralhanae were replacing the Elites as the Honor Guards, taking and wearing their equipment. She even witnessed some Brutes fighting over choice parts. She could only draw to one conclusion and that was that the Prophets were thinking that the Elites could no longer protect them. Kind of a harsh decision, she thought.

When she entered the sanctum at last, Rtas 'Vadumme and two of his Elites were leaving. She stopped to greet him and Rtas simply gave her a nod and the word, "Arbiter,"

"Commander," She replied quickly, easily catching the disappointed expression he had on. Something had happened to cause Rtas to be this upset. Could it be the changing of the guards? Perhaps.

A small sigh interrupted her thoughts. "Politicsâ€| how tiresome..." Truth. The sheer sight of his San 'Shyuum sickened her greatly. "Do you know about this, Katerina? The Elites have threatened to resign. To quit the High Council. All because of thisâ€|" He tried to think of an appropriate word, but probably one to mock the situation. "Exchange of hats?"

Katerina swallowed a little gulp. "You must understand, Noble Hierarch: the Elites have always been your protectors."

"That may be so," He was so monotonous, it was intimidating. "But these are trying times, for all of us."

The Prophet was Mercy was in attendance as well, staying by Truth's side. "Even as the humans' annihilation filled us with satisfaction, the loss of one of the Sacred Rings wracked our hearts with grief." His words took a sorrowful turn at the mention of Installation 04.

Truth winced slightly in annoyance and waved his hand at Mercy "_Putting aside our sorrow_â€|" He glanced at the female Elite once again. "We renewed our faith in the prophecy that the other rings would be found,"

Then, both Prophets parted to reveal Installation 05 through the windows. Katerina had to take in a deep breath at the sight of it; the thought of Halo's purpose irked at her. "And see, Katerina, _how_out faith has been rewardedâ€|"

Mercy raised in arms up high as possible, basking in Halo's presence. "Halo! Its divine wind will rush through the stars! Propelling all who are worthy along the path to salvation!"

Always the preacher, she thought.

"And as you know, Katerina," Truth motioned for her to follow him deeper into the sanctum. "For ages, we searched for one who might unlock the secrets of the ring. An _Oracle_."

And now she knew why: there was 343 Guilty Spark, who seemed to have

been suspended in a gravity beam, preventing any and all sort of movement. She _had _indeed wondered what an happened to the Monitor all this time, ever since Tartarus stuck it onto the end of his Gravity Hammer.

Mercy caught up with them, taking his place opposite Truth and Katerina, around the gravity beam. "And with appropriate humility, Arbiter, we plied the Oracle with questions. And it, with clarity and grace, has shown us the key."

A quick tap to the controls on his gravity throne and a holographic image of a bright green object in the shape of a 'T' popped up in front of her. She tilted her head at it in slight confusion.

"Now then, Katerina, that is why we have summoned you," That caught Katerina's attention and she turned her body to the High Prophet. "You have done well in dealing with the Heretics and their Leader. So you will journey to the surface of the ring and retrieve this Sacred Icon. And with it, we shall fulfill our promise."

_Sacred Icon? Ah. So _this _must be 'Index' that the Monitor was telling Dar about. Bringing it to Halo's control room will activate Halo and destroy all sentient life in the galaxy. _

"And begin the Great Journey."

Keeping her violet eyes fixed on the hologram of the Index, Katerina could only think to herself, "_Not if I can help it."_

10. Hope

Halo **â€"**** Katerina Duran - "Make It Last: Of Trust and Friendship"**

* * *

><p>Location: Phantom Landing Pad, High Charity
November 3****rd****, 2552**

"The Index?"

"Yes. The Monitor told them all about it."

"Butâ€| but if the Monitor told them about the Index thenâ€|"

"I know, Dar. The Prophets should have been informed of Halo's _true _power as well. And yet, they continue to believe in the Great Journey."

"My Goodness. They have lost it,"

"Yes, well, they never had it,"

Katerina Duran's new mission today was to retrieve the Index â€" dubbed as the 'Sacred Icon' by the Covenant â€" from Installation 05's Library. Upon learning this, she was at a great conflict, but she knew what had to be done to save the galaxy. Clad in her Arbiter armor and the violet scarf, she was about to relay her plan to her eldest son.

"Please, mother. Take care of yourself," Darius placed his hands firmly on her shoulders. "If we have learnt anything from the previous Halo's Library, is that the Flood are contained there. I do not wish for you to be traumatized any further."

Katerina tore away from that concerned gaze, and hovered on the edge of a faked smile. "That is a lot to wish for, darling. I must do what I must do and if I have to go through the Flood of all horrid things, then I must." She reached up to pat him left set of mandibles. "I will try to stay calm and not let my fear take over. I promise."

The fact that he could not accompany his mother " that disappointment was what she saw in his eyes. "I just wish you did not have to do this. Once the Prophets get hold of the Index, then that would be it. You _cannot _let them have it, mother."

That was when a smile made its way to her lips. "Who said that the Prophets would get the Index?"

"| Mother?"

"When have you ever known me to do something _without _having a plan, dear boy?" She asked, accompanied by a little laugh. Shifting her eyes behind her son, there stood Tartarus by his Phantom, waiting for Katerina to join up for the mission. "You see, I am going alone on this mission. Once Tartarus picks me up, I kill him and his pilot, take control of the Phantom and run. So once I leave, give yourself some time then make your escape from this wretched place. I do not know how, but we will meet up on Halo."

His mandibles parted slightly in awe. "Are you serious, mother? You are taking a rather huge risk here."

"Do I have a _choice_, Dar? This is the Index we are talking about. We know what would happen once it had been brought to the Control Center! We cannot let that happen. It is time." She got another quick glance at Tartarus, who was getting rather impatient. "I must go now, Dar, but you have to do it."

He gave her an assuring nod at that. "Consider it done, mother. Watch yourself, and I will see you on Halo."

A quick hug and she left her son's presence, wondering if she had made the right decision.

* * *

><p>Location: Onboard the Phantom, en route to Installation 05's Sentinel Wall

The Covenant Carbine was not really a choice weapon for Katerina. She favored her Energy Swords, Plasma Rifles, Needlers and not forgetting Magnums, a weapon created by the humans. She had found that they were highly effective and that it was to her liking.

However, perhaps it was a good idea to have a weapon with some distance, because when dealing with the Flood, Katerina preferred not to be too close to them. In fact, not being in the same room with them was even better. How she hated them.

It was to her understanding that the Containment Shield needed to be brought down in order for the Sentinel Wall to be breached and to enter the Library. If it was Katerina's choice, she would leave it alone. In fact, she would be miles from this place. How blind (and stupid) can the Covenant get? Do they not understand that there is no Great Journey? That-

"Once the shield is down, we will head straight to the Library. I do not wish to keep the Hierarchs waiting."

That deep and unkind tone. Tartarus. She did not know if it was her she was talking to, but when there was silence after he had spoken, she decided to fuel a curiosity she had had since yesterday.

"Tartarus. Do you have any clue as to who murdered the Prophet of Regret?"

She waited for an annoyed and frustrated reply due to the nature of her question and she did. "_Who _do you _think_"

Suddenly, her bright purple eyes lit up. "You mean, the Spar- I mean, the Demon is here?"

He gave her what sounded like an affirmative snort. It sounded a little disgusting to her over her radio. "And he _will pay _for what he has doneâ€|"

Katerina was not listening. She was in beaming smiles. There was hope after all. Her little friend was here on Halo.

* * *

><p>AN: A little chapter before another one of my favorite Arbiter levels, "Sacred Icon"! :)</p>

11. Journey to the Index

Halo **â€"**** Katerina Duran - "Make It Last: Of Trust and Friendship"**

* * *

><p>Location: Sentinel Wall, Installation 05
November 3****rd****, 2552**</p>

Tartarus' Phantom dropped her off at a landing in a huge hole created in the Sentinel Wall. A rather heated battle must have transpired, as evidenced by the purple and blue blood, Covenant weapons and weapons racks, and Sentinel Beams scattered all over the area. She was not even aware that other Covenant forces had been here. It must have been to retrieve the Index.

So if Katerina was sent in, it must be harder to get to the Index than she thought.

She peered past her shoulder to see the Phantom flying off into the dusty and grey night. Alright. It was do or die time. She _had _to get to the Index and make off with it, prevent it from falling into

the Prophets' grimy hands. It would not be an easy task, that was for sure. Flood forms and Sentinels would be crawling everywhere. She had to watch her back and survive.

She clutched the Covenant Carbine close to her beating heart. The air was filled with peril and she could smell it. Before taking the first step, she decided to check the magazine in her Carbine, make sure the two Energy Swords were strapped to the side of her hips and all her Plasma Grenades were accounted for.

Taking a deep breath, she proceeded forward, avoiding the dead bodies and pieces of Sentinels. At the end of this room (what remained of it), was a tall, rectangular piston. On each of the four sides, was what appeared to be a tiny control panel, similar to any Forerunner one. Since there was nowhere else to go, she had to give this control panel a try.

A feather-like touch and the piston hissed, even giving off steam. The next thing she knew, the piston ascended to reveal a passageway, that seemed to be some kind of slide. She stared down at it with widened bright purple eyes. A passageway? That travels downwards?

Was that even safe?

Only one way to find out.

* * *

><p>Soonâ€|

"Ow! Ow! OW! HOW DO I- I DO NOT EVEN- HELP!"

Katerina did not expect for the curvy passageway to be long andâ€| painful. If it was possible, she did not slide down that passageway, she _stumbled._ "Duran's sake! HELP!"

A few more bumps and she landed flat on her face with a 'thud!'. "â€| I do notâ€| appreciate thisâ€|" She said in muffles, lifting herself off the ground. If only she could wear the Arbiter helmet, she would. It would have protected her head. However, it was built for male Sangheili, thus incompatible with her triangular head.

She got to her knees, and saw that her grenades and swords were in place; the Carbine was lying on the ground next to her. Perfect â€" her items were accounted for.

Picking it up, she got to her feet, not without feeling the stings in her body from that fall.

This new room was very enclosed. From a short distance, was another piston, which meant another passageway ride. Great.

From the corner of her eye, was a Sentinel entrance. The lid slide open and out came a Sentinel, much to her displeasure. She halted immediately, struck by fear.

The Sentinel turned and looked at her.

_Oh no. _

The Sentinel fired its beam at her, causing her shields to flicker. She quickly took cover behind a short pillar to ready her Carbine and recharge her shields. The area was quiet as a graveyard so she could easily hear the Sentinel humming towards her location.

Stepping out of concealment, she fired a few rounds into the Sentinel, its shields taking most of the damage, but it did prevent the Sentinel from concentrating and returning the fire. The Sentinel disassembled into little broken pieces.

That may have been out of the way, but this place was sure to be crawling of Sentinel entrances. Only one way to stop them. Reaching to the side of her hip, she pulled out a Plasma Grenade, activated it and flung it at the door.

Now, she had to conquer the next 'fun' slide.

* * *

><p>Soonâ€|

Katerina was still trying to get the hang of tackling this passageway and its weird slide function. At least this time, she landed on her feet.

Once she did, the familiar sounds of gunfire rang through this new area. Walking out, this place had _several _more Sentinel entrances and a few living Grunts and Jackals engaging in battle with them.

"Covenant? Here? And still alive?" She questioned out loud. Might as well assist them.

A nearby Grunt caught sight of the Arbiter and her Carbine shots and gasped in utter shock. "Arbiter?"

"Do not be afraid! Continue firing at them!" No time to say hi!
"Throw your plasma grenades at the Sentinel doors to destroy them! Hurry!"

* * *

><p>Soonâ€|

Finishing off the remaining Sentinel and destroying their doors, Katerina made sure that the remaining Grunts and Jackals were unharmed and spoke with them.

"Lady Arbiter! Our savior!" Another Grunt said gleefully with large, hopeful eyes. Eyeing the Jackal next to it, he harshly said, "Stupid Jackal, say thank you!"

Katerina grinned at that. The Grunts could make her smile at times. "What are you all doing here?"

"Holy Prophets sent us here! To find Sacred Icon, along with Brutes!" replied the same Grunt. "But big, scary thing in next room! Too powerful! Killed many Brutes before we came! We no go back!"

"A big, scary thing? As inâ€¦" Her heart skipped a beat. "A Flood Form?"

"No, Lady Arbiter! Forerunner!"

Her forehead creased with worry and concern for this next enemy in the next room. Getting on the radio, she needed answers. "Tartarus? Have you been monitoring my progress thus far?"

"Indeed I have, little Kate," Katerina almost winced at that. She hated for him to call her that. "You are getting close to one of the shield generators. Many of my Brutes have fallen attempting to take it down. Let us see if you fare better."

"We shall seeâ€¦" She replied bitterly. "I have found some survivors. They speak of a big, scary thing in the next room?"

Tartarus knew that meant. "There is an Enforcer in the shield generator room. A large Forerunner guardian designed to suppress the Flood. It is useless to attack the Enforcer at the front, especially when its shields are up. However with your new friends, I am sure you can take it out." That last sentence was not without mirth.

Ugh. She hated almost everything about that Brute. The slightest thing he would say or do was repulsive to her. "Fine." With that, she cut the connection. "Comrades, if we are to reach the Sacred Icon, we must fight that Enforcer. And I have a plan for it."

* * *

><p>AN: Apologize for the wait. National Exams have taken over my life DX
>

12. 100, 000 Year War

Halo **â€¦**** Katerina Duran - "Make It Last: Of Trust and Friendship"**

* * *

><p>Location: Sentinel Wall, Installation 05
November 3****rd****, 2552**

"There, Lady Arbiter! Big, scary thing!"

Following the Grunts and Jackals, Katerina Duran was taken to where the Enforcer was, occupying the room where the shield generator was. It was her job to overload the power source's lock, remove it and thus opening the way to the wall and through it. That way, Katerina would not have to face the Flood at all once Tartarus picks up her up. Perfect.

"Alright," She turned to the two Grunts and two Jackals. "Use your Plasma Pistols and aim for its shields. One they have been taken down, we strike as hard as possible."

"But Lady Arbiter, what if it strikes _back_?"

"Do not be afraid!" She told them with much encouragement. "Do you not want to do this for theâ€| the Great Journey? Well theâ€| the glorious Sacred Icon lies beyond this thing!" It would only take some fancy Covenant Religion-related words to convince them.

"Ready? Advance!"

A total of three overloaded bolts from their Plasma Pistols and all three of the Enforcer's shield were down. It stumbled backwards, stunned, at which Katerina and her comrades took this opportunity to proceed forward and fire everything they had on that thing levitating above them. She even sent in a Plasma Grenade for kicks.

Just then, the hovering Forerunner machine began to fire missiles from it back spraying the whole room in an effort to strike Katerina or her comrades. She rolled forward, directly under the Enforcer, and stuck another Plasma Grenade under it.

Within the few short seconds she had before it would explode, she rolled forward once again to escape the explosion and possibly, its destruction.

The Enforcer dismantled into pieces in the air before all the parts came crashing down.

Heaving a huge sigh of relieve, she got to her feet and reloaded her Carbineâ€| only to realize that she was only one standing.

* * *

><p>Location: Sentinel Wall (Exterior)

Riding the platform, the gigantic doors before her opened up, revealing the Library. She noticed the bright-green shield surrounding the Library fading away. So the Library's been breached.

Wouldn't this meanâ€| the flood?

Tartarus' Phanom appeared from her right, flying lower as it followed the platform. "Excellent work, Katerina. Our path to the Library is clear," The Brute made radio contact with her. "I will pick you up on the ledge ahead."

"That sounds good to me," She replied, practically elated on the inside. She would not have to fight any Flood!

The door of the approaching wall then opens upâ€| to another Enforcer and upon viewing the Phantom, fired its missiles at it.

She then heard Tartarus growling over the radio in displeasure. "Argh! Blasted machines! Make your own way through the wall, Arbiter!"

"Wait, what?!" Upon witnessing his Phantom flying away from her, she then began to panic as the platform moved closer to the opposite end, where that one Enforcer, a dozen Sentinels andâ€| and Flood Forms began to fight to the death. "No, wait! Tartarus, DO NOT leave me with those abominations! Tartarus!"

He was no longer in radio communication with her. "You unbelievable _bastard_" She screeched at his Phantom as it flew off into the distance. "I can't believe you are leaving me like this! I honestly cannot WAIT until I run off with the Index and neither you, nor your Brutes can do a DAMNED THING about it!"

There was no way she could survive this ongoing conflict between the Sentinels and the Flood Forms. She _needed _a way out.

She had almost forgotten about her armor's cloaking system.

* * *

><p>Location: Containment Shield
**

Katerina had never been so happy to see a piston. Who cares if it was the one with the infuriating slides?

Using her armor's cloaking systems, she managed to slip away and enter the Sentinel Wall. Since the cloaking only lasted a few short seconds, she had to time it perfectly and run as fast as her feet could carry her.

When her cloak _did _fade away and she knew she was being chased by those Flood forms, all she could do was keep running and turn around to give the occasional shot from her Carbine.

The Sentinels, however, did not give her much trouble. In fact, they were more interested in destroying the Flood Forms. This definitely gave some sort of advantage to Katerina; the forms chasing her would slow down.

Running down a hallway and jumping into a large hole at the end of it, she found herself in another long and creepy hallway. Not wanting to waste any time, she proceeded forward, and made an incredible discovery:

Her COM link suddenly picked up the following: "Proceed to the objective, we'll hold out as long as we can- AH NOOO! Get it off me!"

"Suppressive fire! Suppressive FIRE!"

Humans?

It made sense as to why some of those Flood Forms were _Human _Forms.

Humans were here. Yet, why? What business would they have here?

Unlessâ€¦ they were here to retrieve the Index. To stop the Covenant from getting it first.

PERFECT. It was going better than expected. She needed to allow the Humans to retrieve the Index first and take it to safety. Looks like that would be the plan now.

As she moved down this hallway, it was relatively empty, which was good thing. Well, except for the Sentinel pieces and the dead Flood

Forms. Along the way, the weapons used were scattered as well. And Katerina's violet eyes fell on two Magnums.

A smile played on her lips as she retrieved them and found that their magazines were full. She also found that the nearby Flood Human Form was carrying the extra magazines she needed. This was her lucky day! Over the years, she found this human weapon extremely useful, that it became her favorite choice of weapon. Noticing that her Carbine was near empty, she decided to toss that one aside and carry these two, including her twin Energy Swords, which she was yet to use.

Considering how eerie this place was, she suspected that she would need them for close quarter combat _pretty _soon.

* * *

><p>An Energy Alley, several Flood-infested chambers and halls, and one really-not fun tunnel laterâ€|

"Come on, come on!" Striking yet, another control panel on a piston, Katerine turned her back to it and fired her Magnums at the oncoming Elite Combat Forms while the piston opened at a painfully slow rate. "Open up!"

A hard kick to a form that got _way _to close without knowing what personal space was, Katerina spun around, and practically dove into the tunnel.

No matter how hard she tried to keep her footing, there was just no use; she was going through this tunnel as if it was a pinball machine.

"OW! WAIT! NO, STOP!"

A few more 'ows' and 'oofs' and she landed flat on her face. Again. "Duran's sakeâ€| the Forerunners were TERRIBLE designers!" She cursed as she pushed herself off the floor.

She found that she was still within the tunnel, but that there was a large square-like doorway just in front of her. With a pained grunt, she got to her feet and it opened up, revealing the outside. The Library was there, in a distance, against a sky of black and orange.

In these parts of Halo, the weather was meant to be wintery, it seems. The biting, predatory chill gazed against whatever skin the armor did not protect. Walking on the snowy grounds, she decided to stop to rest a little. Two consecutive tunnel rides was not what her body needed.

As soon as she sat on a nearby rock, Orbital Insertion Pods came plummeting through the air and landed around her, giving her a bit of a scare.

About 5 of them were there. Elites kicked open the covers and was greeted by the sight of a tired Arbiter.

"Forerunners be praised!" The lone Zealot in there ran up to Katerina, offering his hand to get her to her feet. "The

Arbiter!"

Taking his hand, she questioned him about their presence here. "What are you all doing here, brother?"

"This Quarantine Zone has been compromised, Arbiter," He replied, pulling out twin Plasma Rifles from their holsters attached to his sides. "We must do what we can against the Flood. The Commander has landed further in. Come. Let us join him."

Oh. So Rtas was here as well. The Prophets were not taking any chances! News of the Humans attempting to reach to the Index must have hit them and how they are doing whatever it takes. Well, as long as Katerina was still here that was not going to happen.

* * *

><p>AN: Okay, inukag94, I updated! SO DON'T EAT ME :'(

>Happy belated birthday! Thanks for following this story! :)

**Yay. National Exams are over! x)
>

13. Betrayal

Halo **â€œ**** Katerina Duran - "Make It Last: Of Trust and Friendship"**

* * *

><p>Location: Sentinel Wall, Installation 05
November
3****rd****, 2552**

"Well, now that the threat has been neutralized for nowâ€œ| What are you doing here, Katerina?"

Katerina took a second to catch her breath, and wipe away a small trail of blood on her neck. "The Inde- I mean, Sacred Icon. I have been sent to retrieve it where others have failed. It isâ€œ| critical to the Great Journey so I must do what I can to find it."

Rtas Vadumee nodded in comprehension. "Then you are not alone," Turning his back to Katerina, he began to address the remaining Elites from the last battle. "We shall cut into the heart of this infestation, retrieve the Icon, and burn any Flood that stand in our way!"

His Elites roared in agreement, save for Darius Duran, who was eyeing his mother.

Satisfied with his unit's declaration, the Commander turned back to Katerina. "The parasite is not to be trifled with, Arbiter. I hope you know what you are doing."

A faint smile played on her thin lips. "Oh, but I do, Commander. Not to worry." I know exactly what to do. And it involves me running off with your precious 'Icon'.

"Proceed, then. I will follow when reinforcements arrive." So saying, he headed back to his Phantom, prompting Darius to walk over to his mother, and give her the overdue hug.

"Change of plans, I presume?"

"So it seems, dear boy," She was just overjoyed to see her firstborn. Pulling back, Darius handed her his Energy Sword to replace one of her two which had ran out of battery. "Retrieving the Index is still my duty. However, since you are here with me, we would not have to meet up or have you escape High Charity. Let us stay close and do this together, alright?"

"Of course, mother," He said with what she knew would have been a little smile as he lifted her chin up higher. "Together."

* * *

><p>Inside the structureâ€|

"What?! The parasite controls our vehicles?!"

"No matter! They will die all the same!"

It was a rather horrifying sight: seeing Flood Combat Forms take control of vehicles, be they Human or Covenant. Katerina suddenly felt like breaking a cold sweat, seeing as how she and Darius were on foot. However, the Elites using Ghosts and a lone Spectre were taking care of it; Katerina and Darius could focus on the Sentinels high above them.

Paying close attention, Katerina found a Flood-controlled Ghost attempt to run her over. Moving fast, she instead timed it perfectly and rolled out of the way, when the Ghosts used its boost and was thrown over the ledge, into the abyss. _Not very smart, are we?_

Sticking close together, the unit moved forward to find an unmanned Warthog. At the lower level, there a Scorpion Tank, more Ghosts, and another Warthog, all of which are controlled by the Flood.

"Darius! The Warthog!" Katerina pointed to it. "Take control of the turret!"

Warthogs: a favorite of Katerina's, next to the Scorpion Tanks. She liked how much damage a Tank could do. A Wraith was a little useless to her, considering how slow it was and its lack in accuracy. It took a while, but her years in the Covenant allowed her to come across Human vehicles and even learn to operate them. Her size was just right to fit into the driver's seat.

"Take down every Flood bastard you see, Dar,"

"Keep it steady for me then, mother!"

* * *

><p>At the Gondolasâ€|

She had no idea Flood-controlled vehicles could be so intimidating, especially when it was valley full of Flood-controlled Wraiths. By the time Katerina and Darius were done with all those Wraiths, their Warthog was beat up. She and Darius and their unit had to travel on foot when it came to the Sentinel Construct factory. Once they had bypassed it, a fully-operational tank was waiting for them, much to Katerina's joy.

Now, what was left of the unit was taking the Gondola to the Library. Tartarus finally joined up, his Phantom flying above the Gondola. "I see that coward did not join you. I will do what I can to keep the Flood away from you."

_Somehow, I do not count on itâ€¦ _

The entrance the Library was in the shape of circle. As the Gondola proceed forward, the circular entrance rotated and then opened up in four-quarters. The Forerunners had quite the design, but it was not impressing Katerina, once she had met their not-so-fun tunnels.

"We are getting close," Katerina nudged at her son, taking in a slow breath.

"Nervous, mother?"

"We are about to escape with an instrument that very well determines the fate of the Universe, and when we do, the Covenant are not going to be happy about it. So yesâ€¦ I _am _nervous," She said. "We will be hunted. This was a stupid plan. What was I even thinking?!"

"Mother," Darius gripped her upper arms to calm her. "We will figure it out. But right now, it is important that we do not let the Index fall into _their _hands. We will do what we must. The future? We will figure that out later."

Katerina was unknowingly cupping both sides of his face. Panic was just flowing through her like a flood. "Yes. Yes, you are right. We can do this."

"We cannot let the humans capture the Icon!" Tartarus' bellow over the COM channels interrupted the moment. "The Hierarchs do not look kindly on failure!"

The Humans had already taken a Gondola and were ahead of Katerina. Perhaps that was a good thing. It meant that she and her son would just have to _protect _them from these Covenant forces as they leave with the Index, right?

"But we would not have to do much," She turned her head to him again. "The Humans have advanced. _They _know of Halo's true purpose. They will be taking the Index only to keep it safe. All we need to do is ensure that they take off with it, right?"

"Rightâ€¦" She caught the realization in his apple-green eyes. "They do not pose as a threat. They hope to stop the Prophets from firing Halo."

So Katerina grinned. "We now have a plan: protect the Humans."

* * *

><p>Location: The Library (at last!)

"The humans are already inside, Arbiter! After them! The Elites and I will watch the perimeter."

Katerina stepped off the Gondola with one Energy Sword and two Magnums in her possession. She straightened her shawl (amazed that it was still in perfect condition after everything that had transpired; perhaps not letting the Flood get close to her was a reason) and turned to her son. "As we have discussed, Dar."

Darius nodded. "I will be right here. Do not worry â€" Tartarus is _not_ going anywhere."

She returned the nod. "Alright then. Wish me luck, my boy."

The short walk to the Index's resting place â€" the ground was decorated with bodies of Humans and Flood Combat Forms. One heck of a battle went on in here, leaving next to no survivors. This highly worried Katerina.

"Did _anyone_ _survive?" She questioned, unable to take her eyes of the carnage. "Only one way to find out."

* * *

><p>Soonâ€|

"McKenzie, Perez, how's our exit? You hear me, Marines?!"

"Humans! I come in peace!"

A sudden cry with no one in sight caused Commander Miranda Keyes and Sergeant Jonson to freeze and exchange a look of major confusion. They never took their fingers off the trigger as they waited for the mysterious person to reveal themselves.

They were greeted with an unusual sight â€" a being they had never seen before. However, if the Master Chief's encounter aboard the infested _Pillar of Autumn_ said anything, the two Humans were looking at a rare female Elite.

"Johnson, do _not_ _take_ your finger off that trigger!"

"I don't intend to!"

"Please, wait!" Katerina had her hands up in the air, trying her best to show that she was not a threat. "I do not mean any harm whatsoever! You _must_ _listen_ to me!" She took the smallest of steps towards them.

"Hold it _right there_," Miranda almost growled, to which Katerina obeyed, keeping her hands in the air. "Johnson? Isn't this what the Chief encountered back on the _Pillar of Autumn_?"

"Suuuure is," Johnson tightened his grip on his Battle Rifle. "Matches Cortana's rendering of her. This Elite did not take a swing at the Chief whatsoever. She _protected_ _him_."

"If you are referring to the Spartan and his A.I. companion, then yes. I _have _met them aboard your ship!" Katerina said, then eyeing the Index hooked to Miranda's belt. "But you _must _hear me out! I request that you take the Index and leave this place with it!"

"Say what?" A mere whisper came from Johnson.

"The Covenant had arrived at the Library. You _must _leave with the Index _now_!" Her pleas were only drawing more confusion and she knew that. "I _know _of Halo's purpose! I _know _what it does upon firing it! Please, I do not wish for the destruction of all sentient life in this galaxy! I am _begging _you - please leave with the Index immediately!"

The two Humans were unsure and she could tell from their facial expressions. Just as she was about to say something else, they both began to tremor uncontrollably, like they were hit by a wave of electricity.

"No!" She hurried to them, but they both had already fallen to the ground. She was about to reach for Miranda to wake her whenâ€|

"Turn, Katerina."

_Oh noâ€| It can't beâ€| _Fear had a strong grip on her as she got to her feet and turned around in a slow manner.

Tartarus, his Fist of Rukt and two of his ugly Brutes.

As if she had no control, she began to gradually back away from them as they advanced towards her. Katerina needed to be careful â€" behind her, was a very large hole into some kind of abyss; in the center of it was the Index's resting place.

"Tartarusâ€| it is not what it seemsâ€|" Her own voice was trembling with absolute terror.

She caught sight of a sick smile on his face. "Excellent work, Katerina. The Hierarches will be pleased."

Her forehead creased with mystification at that. She never stopped taking those small steps. "O-oh?"

It was then she saw how his two Brutes, armed with Brute Shots, were _aiming _those things at her. Her eyes darted to each Brutes repeatedly. "What is the meaning of this, Tartarus?"

Immediately, his smile turned into a grimace. "You never changed your views, did you now, little Kate? Still refusing to believe in the Covenant religion? Even after all these years? Wellâ€| your actions sent many from the State of Duran to their deathsâ€| now _I _will send you to yours."

"Three against one? That _hardly _seems fair, you ugly bastard." She growled, realizing the current situation.

"No, it is not," Tartarus nodded. "We could have your son here to sort of even it out, but I am afraid he will _not _be joining

us."

Panic. Again. "What have you done with my son?!" A sudden yell emerged from her throat.

"No matter, little Kate. You will join him soon,"

_No! Not- not Darius too! It cannot be! _A part of her suddenly died at that statement.

"And as will the rest of your incompetent race!"

"You BASTARD!"

Katerina attempted to reach for her Magnums attached to the side of her thighs when a jerk of his Fist of Rukt created a shockwave that struck her tremendously. All she could manage was a pained cry. She tumbled backward, missing that ledge and ultimately falling, her back against the void below her.

14. Oh, So That's How It Is

Halo **â€"**** Katerina Duran - "Make It Last: Of Trust and Friendship"**

**Location: Deep beneath the Library
>November 3rd, 2552
**

"I...? I am a monument to all your sins..."

Consciousness hit Katerina Duran hard and it was not a very pleasant feeling. Her entire body was aching and her head was spinning. Cracking open her violet eyes, she was gazing at a circle of red lights on the ceiling of some...

_Where _was she, anyway?

She remembered being ambushed by Tartarus and his Brutes. He stole the Index and used the electric waves from his Fist of Rukt at her and that was all she knew.

No wait.

Darius!

Gathering information from Tartarus' cruel words, he had murdered him. Her son. Her _firstborn_. Another member of her family dead, all because of her. Tears were coming to her instantly.

Katerina attempted to sit up when she then realizedâ€| something had been wrapped around her.

_Tentacles? _

She tugged at the tentacle around her waist to pull it off her. "What is the name of Duran- WHOA!"

Without any warning, she found herself getting dragged awayâ€| to meet the face of this mysterious creature that has her in its

grasp.

This creature was of the Flood, that she knew. Its head consisted only of a large mouth with two different jaws. Its body was snake-like and comprised of numerous tentacles.

Comprehending fully what she was seeing, her heart began to beat rapidly and she let out a couple of screams out of fright.

"Waitâ€| Chief, that's her!"

"Who?"

She halted her screaming once she picked up those two voices coming from her left. Darting her head to the voices, she held her breath one more.

This Flood creature had someone else in its grasp. A UNSC Spartan. In fact, it was the same Spartan she had met aboard the Pillar of Autumn. It was the one she indirectly and directly assisted in destroying the ship so it could ultimately cause a big enough explosion to destroy Halo â€" a decision she made that resulted in her getting branded for life.

"The female Elite we encountered aboard the Autumn! That's her!"

"Are you sure?"

"I never forget the only member of the Covenant who didn't kill us, but instead protect us!"

Katerina could not say anything. She did not know what to say.

The creature before them made was sounded like a grunt, capturing their attention and then turned his head to the Spartan. "This one is machine and nerveâ€| and has its mind concludedâ€|" It said, then wrapping one tentacle around his head, to which he tried to shake it off.

Rather poetic, this thing was. She held her breath when it turned its massive head to her instead and she felt herself getting spun around and inspected, much to her displeasure. But she could not take having this thing in her clutches. Her fear of the Flood was now accelerating to a much higher level. She continued to whimper as it spoke. "This one is but flesh and faith, and is the more deluded..."

"Do not touch me!" It came out as little squeak. "Release me! I do not like this!"

"Somebody better tell her to relaxâ€|" Cortana murmured, still unable to comprehend the situation they were in.

"Have patience," It told Katerina, who was reluctant to look at the creature. "This is much to talk."

"Talk?" That single word slipped out of the Master Chief's mouth in a confused manner.

"And I have listened. Greatly," It said to him. "Through rock and metal and time. Nowâ€¦ I shall talk and you shall listen."

The evolved creature then raised two of his tentacles, one wrapped around a what appears to be a Monitor and the other merged withâ€¦ an infected Prophet of Regret.

With tears in her eyes, she exclaimed, "Regret?!"

This Monitor resembled 343 Guilty Spark, except this one's eye lit up red instead. "Greetings! I am 2401 Penitent Tangent. I am the Monitor of Installation 05." It introduced itself to the Chief, Cortana and Katerina.

Regret was _fused _with this creature's tentacles. Was this how it evolved? A mere collection of infected bodies? "And I am the Prophet of Regret! Councilor most High... Hierarch of the Covenant!"

Regret was struggling to put together coherent words, but it did not matter to Katerina. Anger was coming to her in an instant. "Regret, you _bastard_! I do not understand how you could still be _alive _but I do not care! I still want you _dead_!" Though it was utterly useless, she tried to break free from the Flood creature's grasp.

2401 Penitent Tangent then catches sight of the Spartan. "A Reclaimer? Here? At last!" The Monitor sounded relieved. "We have much to do! This facility must be activated if we are to control this outbreak!"

To which, the infected Regret responded, still finding it hard to speak. "Stay where you are! Nothing can be done until my sermon is complete!"

"Not. True. This installation has a successful utilization record of 1.2 trillion simulated and one actual. It is ready to fire on demand."

_Perfect. _

Regret appeared to now take notice of Katerina's presence. "Of all the objects our Lords left behindâ€¦ there are none so worthless as these _Oracles_!" He himself started to display anger using whatever little energy he had left. "They know _nothing_ of the Great Journey!"

If Katerina could claw out of these tentacles and pounce on Regret, she would. "The Great Journey is a _lie_, you ignorant bastard! It ALWAYS has been! I did not need to be betrayed by your fool of a Brute Chieftain to know that! I knew it _many years _ago! What you were about to do was send all of us to our deaths by firing Halo!"

These statements by the female Elite just confused the Chief and Cortana further. She was highly unusual. If she felt so differently about the Covenant, why join? Why stay, for that matter?

Penitent Tangent could not show it, but he sounded like he was highly offended by Regret's comments. "And _you_ know nothing about containment! You have demonstrated a complete disregard to even the

most _basic_ protocols!" Like a parent scolding his child.

The evolved creature had heard enough. It first lifted the Monitor, "This one's 'containment'..." and then Regret, but not with a disgust huff, "And this one's 'Great Journey'... are the same." It then lowered both its tentacles into the abyss and all the Chief and Katerina could hear were petrified yelps by Regret.

The creature addressed the terrified Katerina once more, who had tears rolling down her perfectly-shaped cheeks. "Your Prophets have promised your kind freedom from a doomed existence, but they will find no salvation on this ring, as you already know. Those who built this place knew what they wrought. Do not mistake their intent, or all will perish as they did before."

Why was this thing telling her things she _already_ knew? "Do not tell this to me! Tell this to the Prophets who seek what they think is divinity! They know _nothing_ and are blind to the truth! Do NOT associate me with them!"

"Chief, this is something you don't hear every day, coming from a Covenant soldier!"

"I agree. Who _is_ _this_ woman?"

"As you wish," Katerina certainly did not expect a calm reply from the enormous, obviously perilous creature. "For now, we must stop the key from turning, but first it must be found," Its head acknowledged both the Spartan and the Elite respectively. "You will search one likely spot, and you will search another. Fate had us meet as foes, but this ring will make us brothers."

What? 'Brothers'? Does this thing honestly think we can live in peace? No! Flood areâ€| areâ€| merciless! Consuming! They are

Katerina was not giving the chance to shape more thoughts. She felt herself shifting.

15. Relief

Halo **â€|**** Katerina Duran - "Make It Last: Of Trust and Friendship"**

* * *

><p>"I am laying down my weapons. I am not _your enemy. But you have to listen to what I have to say." _

"_What's going on? Why are you _protecting _me?"_

"_This might be highly unusual to you, but I do not side with the Covenant. I know you are looking to destroy this vessel so that it will ultimately destroy this ring. The Covenant forces on this ship do not know that but you are still in danger, having to fight two types of enemies. Move through the Cryochambers as your A.I. has instructed; I have pulled every Covenant members from there."_

"_What theâ€¦!_"_

"_Now! Go! I do not have time to explain my motives! Just overload your vessel's engines, and get off this ring!" _

* * *

><p>Location: Unknown location on Installation 05
November 4th, 2552 **

"OW!"

Landing on her backside was not a nice feeling for Katerina Duran to experience so soon after being teleported. She felt as if bits and pieces of her were put back together and now she was here â€" still on Installation 05, but somewhere far from the Library, as evidenced by the clear blue skies.

She appeared to be in some kind of jungle. Now the Flood creature told her that it would be teleporting her to a possible location where the Index might be. This was certainly not High Charity. Soâ€¦|

Wait. Where would you go to 'start the Great Journey'?

The Control Room.

Was that where she was? Or had to travel to? Maybe. It _was _likely.

Katerina noticed that her two Magnums were still attached to the sides of her thighs. Good. They were fully loaded, but she only had one extra clip left. Not good. She would have to conserve her ammunition the best she could.

Katerina wanted to start moving into the forest after her sharp ears picked up the distinguished sounds of Brute Shots. However, she could not make the first step. Instead, she plopped onto a nearby rock, her heart crushing. It was because the thought of her eldest son, Darius, hit her hard and it brought tears to her almost immediately. She buried her face in her hands and began to sob heavily, mumbling his name. Now all she had were two children, her two girls, back at the Duran Keep in the State of Duran.

Wiping away her tears, she decided to instead take her frustrations out on the Brutes and other Covenant Loyalists she would find along the way. 30 years of silence and committing acts for the Covenant in order to secure the safety of her State â€" all of that ended today.

Around the corner, she spotted two Brutes overlooking a corpse of an Elite, their latest victim, she guessed. Activating her active camo, she trotted her way over to them. Her hoofs against the dried leaves created the crackling sound that alerted them to spin around but by the time they reacted, her wrist blades were in their exposed necks.

She did not want to waste any more time. Taking a left turn, she found a door on a cliff above her. Her motion tracker revealed several Brutes in that area. Pulling out both her Magnums, she aimed

and fired.

Two of the three Brutes on the ground level fell instantly. Two bullets into the last one and he fell too. Moving forward, two Brute Captains with Brute Shots were waiting for her, guarding the ramp to the door.

She fired more shots at the Brutes but two simultaneous grenades from their Brute Shots caused her to withdraw behind a large tall rock. Peeping to her left, she fired two shots, one of them caught and fell with a pained howl.

The other Brute Captain released more grenades that exploded immediately on contact. Debris almost blinded her, but she was not harmed. Moving out of her hiding place, she prepared to make the one shot to the Brute Captain's head when a shot from a Beam Rifle passed by in a flash, and he himself fell like a ragdoll.

Katerina gawked with widened eyes. Taking a few steps forward, she turned her head to the left.

"I could not let you have all the fun now, could I?"

It couldn't be.

The female Elite almost dropped her weapons in awe. She was able to find her voice and scream, "Dar!" in happiness and run like hell up the ramp to meet up with him.

Darius was already in smiles, ready to hug his mother. "By the heavens, you are alright!" She squealed, running into his arms.

He almost lifted her off the ground, equally thrilled to see her. "And so are you, mother! I had feared for the worst when I could not locate you for hours."

"That bastard of a Brute!" The cracking in her sweet voice indicated her inability to hold back a cry. "Tartarus told me he had murdered you! I was so crushed to hear that. I could not handle another death, Dar. I simply _couldn't_!"

"Now, now, dear mother, I am here now. _Nothing_ is tearing me away from you, I swear it." He said, pulling back to look at her in her violet eyes.

Her hands travelled to his mandibles, simply grateful that her eldest was with her now. "How did you survive? Tartarus made it seem he had gotten rid of everyone."

"He thought that silly stick he carried around could have a drastic effect on me. He was wrong."

She sighed at that. "Well, it was not the first time he was wrong. No matter. You are here. I am here," Darius caught the sight of determination in her eyes. "Let us finish this."

A nod was the reply she got. "According to the channels, Tartarus is heading for the Control Room."

"He has the Index. He stole it from me before he left me for dead. We

must hurry! There is much I have to tell you."

16. Fight Club

Halo **â€"**** Katerina Duran - "Make It Last: Of Trust and Friendship"**

* * *

><p>Location: Unknown location on Installation 05
November 4th, 2552 **

"I sincerely hope we are getting closer to the Control Room. I cannot take any more of this running around. After all, I had been running around looking for that stupid Icon prior to this. And your mother is not getting any younger!"

Darius managed to break a chuckle in the middle of it all. "Well, your appearance says otherwise. Not to worry; we are getting closer to the Control Room. They cannot do anything without a human's touch, remember? And I am sure the two humans they captured will not be willing to accede to it anyway."

"Let us hope they last long enough before we get thereâ€"|" Heaving a great sigh, they both went through the next Forerunner-designed door.

Passing through, they were about to take a left turn when Darius gently clutched his mother's left upper arm. "Mother, hold on. A Wraith is approaching. And it is an ally."

"What?" Yet, he was right. Her motion tracker stated that something big, yet an ally, was heading their way.

True enough, taking that left turn and a Wraith was indeed approaching them. Yet, that did not stop Katerina from raising her lone Magnum at it, knowing full well a Magnum can't do much damage on a Wraith.

The Wraith's lid slid backâ€"|" to reveal Rtas Vadumee.

"Commander?"

"Katerina! Darius!" Well, Rtas was just as awed. "Chatter on the channels said the both of you were dead!"

"Yes wellâ€"|" Bitterness seeped through her tone immediately. "30 years in the Covenant and still living? I think my son and I have a pretty impressive streak." The female Elite had been keeping that tone to every former member of the Covenant she had met thus far. It was practically, her way of saying, 'I told you so'. "Commander, the Councilors have been murdered. By the Brutes. I apologize greatly."

It did not stop the anger from growing inside of him and him bringing down a fist on the Wraith. "Vile, disloyal beasts! The Prophets were fools to trust them!"

"No, Commander, do you not understand?" She took a step forward. "There is no Great Journey. There never was. The Prophets were just fools to believe that they were the Forerunner's chosen ones and that Halo could send them into a divinity after death! Halo instead sends us all to our deaths!"

With confusing clearly written on his face, he stepped off the Wraith to meet with the two members of the Duran family. "Speak like you make sense, Katerina."

Her mind was going to explode, but unfortunately, he was not his fault whatsoever. "On the first Halo ring, at the Library, Darius encountered the Monitor - the same one that was with the Heretics. The Monitor explained of Halo's true purpose " upon activation, Halo kills all sentient life! In order to starve the Flood!" She hoped that her pleas were getting to him.

Two blinks from the Commander and he felt like everything was suddenly so wrong. "Katerina, upon learning this, why did you not bring this to the Council?"

She ran two hands through her waist-length glossy hair, fighting back the tears. "Would they have believed me? Believed my sons? No! Why? Because in the eyes of every single Covenant soldier, Katerina, Darius and Versera Duran were heretics, simply taking the last resort, which was joining the Covenant, just to save what was left in the State of Duran!"

"So what you are saying is when you recovered the Monitor"

She had taken a few deep breaths by then to calm herself. "Yes The Monitor is not one for silence. He does not stop talking. The Prophets knew exactly what activating Halo would do but they still continued on. Because they were absolutely, positively, stupid and oblivious... They want to hear what they want to hear And it HAD to take the destruction of my State and 30 years for everything to come to LIGHT!"

"Mother!" Darius stepped forward to pull her into his arms. "Please calm yourself! I think the Commander understands now."

That did not make Katerina feel any better though. Everything the State of Duran stood for " disbelieving in the Forerunners, disliking the formation of the Covenant " all of it gone and it had to take that, and an additional 30 years to be known for a fact that everything was a lie.

Too little, too late. The State of Duran and all of its keeps would still never be the same again.

Katerina pulled away turning her backs on the two males.

Darius knew he would have to talk to his mother heart-to-heart one day, just for her to vent her frustrations. Ever since the massacre 30 years ago, not once had she wanted to pour out her feelings. It was as if she preferred to suffer in silence.

Darius turned back to Rtas instead. "Tartarus has the Index as well as two Humans, Commander. And Halo can only be activated by a human's

touch. Where is the Brute? There is no word of him on the channels, not that we can tell."

"According to the channels, he was previously at High Charity, but he had departed," Rtas turned his head behind him to present to Darius the tall Forerunner structure far behind them. "To arrive here â€" at the Control Room. To start what was supposed to be the Great Journey."

Staring at the Control Room, Darius said, "So he has not arrived yetâ€| Perfect. Then we must take control of that place and retrieve the Index from him." He then spun around to walk up to his mother. "Mother-

"I want that bastard's head mounted against the wall," She suddenly growled, scaring Darius a little, though he did not want to admit it. "We must get there before him."

No sooner had those words slipped out of her mouth, two Phantoms fly high above them, heading for the Control Room. Those none of the three could see who the Phantoms' occupants were, they had only one guess.

"Oh, for the sake of Duranâ€|!"

"Not just yet, Katerina," Rtas cut in. "I may just know of a way to get up there."

* * *

><p>AN: A little chapter before Kate teams up with Johnson!
:)</p>

17. New Alliances

****Halo ****â€"**** Katerina Duran - "Make It Last: Of Trust and Friendship"****

* * *

><p>Location: Near the Control Room on Installation
05
November 4th, 2552**</p>

"â€| A Scarabâ€|"

"At the far end of the beach, there's a passage into the cliff, where the Scarab is docked. Take command of the Scarab and its power should be more than enough to break through the Control Room's doors." Rtas Vadum told the female Elite, who was still eyeing the Scarab.

"It sounds like the only plan we have, mother," Darius walked up to her, catching her attention.

"So it seems. Let us proceed."

* * *

><p>Several Brutes laterâ€| </p>

Once Katerina and her team went through what felt like the twentieth door, it was found to be an open area, resembling a landing pad. There was the parked Scarab and maybe two or three Banshees, but on this landing pad, Katerina was also facing Brutes and their human prisoners – one of them being the male human she entered at the Library – Sergeant Johnson!

The Brutes had their human prisoners forced onto their knees with their Brute Shots in hand, the knife portion of it aimed at their necks. Katerina and her team had to act fast.

"GET THEM!"

"What the- the Arbiter is still alive! Kill them all!"

This was no competition. She had Hunters with her. But she could not allow those humans to be caught in the crossfire. "Do not harm the humans!"

The Brutes were completely taken aback. Even with their Brute Captain's order, they were unable to react instantly. Plasma and grenades exchanged, and Katerina's team emerged victorious. The humans seemed unharmed, thank goodness. Now Katerina needed to have a talk with the human she knew prior to this.

"Well, well. If it isn't Lady 'Gator!"

Katerina could only stare at him with puzzlement. "Umâ€¦. 'Lady 'Gator'? Forgive me, I do not know what that means. However, if you are seeking for my name, it is Katerina Duran."

A wide smile came to the man as he accepted the Brute Shot given to him by one of his marines. "Well, it's nice to get the name of the only member of the Covenant that tries to do and say the exact opposite of what other Covies usually do. You got some explaining to do, missy!"

Now that the female Elite understood perfectly. "I understand what you mean. This is in regards to my actions onboard your vessel as well at the Library, isn't it?" Heaving another sigh, she then said, "I am afraid now is not the appropriate time to answer all of your burning questions, sir. What you must know and understand fully is that my son Darius and I, we are simplyâ€¦ prisoners in this Covenant. In exchange for the safekeeping of my home and remaining family, the deal was to join and accept the Covenant Religion."

"Oooooooooohâ€¦" That sounded like an understanding 'oh' from the human. "So you two are just pawns?"

"In short, yes," This was followed by a nod. "Listen, I understand if you are still skeptical of me, but all will be revealed when we face Tartarus."

Brown eyes suddenly flared, but the sergeant kept his current composure. "So that's Mr. Mohawk's name? Sounds yucky, but I don't care! We got to stop him before he activates this ring! Or we're all gonna die."

"He cannot achieve activation without the touch of a human!"

A sarcastic grunt came to him. "You were at the Library. Don't you remember there were two of us?"

Her violet eyes widened in utter horror. "He has the female human? Duran's sake! he has _already _arrived at the Control Room! We must leave now!" She then frantically pointed at the Scarab. "The Scarab's main cannon would be more than enough to break through its doors and reach to it."

"HA! Say no more, Lady 'Gator!"

"Sir, my name is not-"

Johnson spun around, heading for the Scarab. "Kicking ass is our business! Grab one of those Banshees and give me some cover. There's no doubt that ape would have his minions guard the way to the Control Room!"

Raising one eyebrow, she turned to her eldest child instantaneously, with more horror written all over her face.

Darius could only shake his head in silent laughter. Putting his hands on his mother's shoulder comfortingly, he told her, "_I _will commandeer a Banshee in your place. Go with the human. Make sure he does not press any wrong buttons."

"I HEARD that, split-chin! But I'M still drivin'!"

18. Behind Closed Eyes

Halo **â€"**** Katerina Duran - "Make It Last: Of Trust and Friendship"**

* * *

><p>Location: Onboard the Scarab, Installation 05
November 4th, 2552**

"So. Not a fan of Banshees, eh?"

Swallowing a lump in her throat, she nodded her head as she gazed through the windows of the Scarab to view what they were up against as they made their way to the Control Room. "They are very challenging to pilot. After the ride, I _always _end up seeing stars. Best let my son handle it."

"And the best part is you can tell him apart from the other split-chins!" Sergeant Johnson pointed out, hitting another button.

Katerina just stood there, her eyes narrowing at him. "There _are _distinctions between every male Sangheili, sergeantâ€"!"

His reply was in the form a short laugh. "Not that I can see!"

_Such vibrancy even in the middle of battle. _"Well, I _am _his mother, after all. And if I may askâ€" have you _always _been like

this?"

"What, like handsome?"

There was no way she could stop that smile from forming, especially when he appeared to be so innocent when saying that. "I simply meanâ€¦ we must have met likeâ€¦ 2 minutes ago and you are, quite honestly, the first person I have met who has suchâ€¦ _flare _during a battle!"

Shrugging his shoulders, he then said, "Well, that's the beauty of hangin' out with me, sweetheart â€" it's NEVER boring!" He then flashed a wide grin at his new companion, and received one back.

The extremely short walk to the Control Room was laced with several Wraiths and Banshees, all controlled by Brutes. "You need not have to worry about the Banshees, sergeant. The Elites can handle that. The Brutes' aggressiveness and hastiness meant that they could never drive Banshees with the gracefulness that was requiredâ€¦"

"Then leave the Wraiths to me, Katerina!" He halted the Scarab abruptly. "You just relax."

She shrugged her shoulders at that. "If you insist. I could use the rest."

A Wraith's main cannon did little to no damage to the Scarab. So even multiple hits from multiple Wraiths did not do much, and the Scarab kept going. Katerina was actually getting quite impressed with Sergeant Johnson and the fact he could operate a Scarab. Katerina herself did not know the first thing about using a Scarab. Just another reason to respect humans.

"Well, there is it!"

Katerina peered through the window and there was the Control Room. Right now, there was absolutely no time to waste. Tartarus was in there with the Index, so the fate of the galaxy was in his hands at the moment. Not for long.

"You might want to hold onto something, Arby!"

Arby?

"Hey! Bastards! KNOCK, KNOCK!"

And for the last time, the Scarab trembled slightly as its main cannon fired, creating a gaping hole at where the Control Room's doors used to be.

Gazing out of the windows again and she witnessed the Elites in Banshees heading to land at the Control Room. The Scarab was just the right height for Katerina and Johnson to get off and meet up with the Elites at the landing pad of the Control Room. This was it. Her feud with Tartarus was going to end right now.

* * *

><p>Location: Control Room

"Please, use caution! This Reclaimer is delicate!"

"One more word, Oracle, and I'll rip your eye from its socket!"

"Tartarus. _Stop_."

The Chieftain of the Brutes stood over the console, eyes widening in shock once he picked up that voice. "Hm?" He gradually turned his head, and eventually his whole body.

There stood a seriously-pissed off Katerina, her son, at least 5 other Elites and the other human.

Tartarus had 4 Brute Captains at his side, as well as the female human he held hostage. She had the Index in her hands. The Brute could not _believe_ Katerina and Darius were still alive! Darius had fallen to his Fist of Rukt and she fell into a bottomless _pit_, for goodness' sake!

"Impossible!"

"27 years and you still think I am killable? Honestly, you have no faith in me."

The corner of his mouth curved into a frown as he growled. "Having no faith was what put you in your current position, little Kate,"

Katerina had not had the slightest clue how she was able to be calm as of this moment. "Do you remember, Tartarus, before you put thisâ€| this _thing_ on my chest," Her dirtied silver scarf was in the way, so she was unable to expose the Mark of Shame on her upper left chest. "I told you that a time will come where we will engage in battle and only one of us will stand victorious? Well, it appears that that time has come."

Tartarus was not to be intimidated by a simple female Elite, let alone Katerina Duran. "Iâ€| briefly remember that, little Kate. The only thing I remember is your voice piercing the skies as you were being branded. Tell me: was that how you screamed while you were holding Micah in your arms?"

Nowâ€| _now_ she was quaking with suppressed fury after seeing that sick grin on his ugly-ass face. "You _are not worthy_ to speak his nameâ€| not after what you did to himâ€| I have _waited_ years for this moment â€" the moment where I _finally_ _get_ my hands on you. I promise you that your _head_ _will_ mounted against that wall! And your precious little _Prophets_ _cannot_ do a _damned_ thing _about_ it!" The anger within her was displayed through her threats and the volume of her voice. "Unhand the female and put down the icon, you bastard! Now!"

"Ha!" He replied with an amused laugh. "As disobey the Hierarchs?"

"To _oblivion_ _with_ them all!" She almost shrieked. "They do not know a damn thing about Halo! And neither do you! You will be sending us to our _deaths_!"

His 4 Brutes then stepped forward menacingly, but a hand raised by Tartarus stopped them. "Take care, little Kate-

"ENOUGH of calling me that! Only Micah is allowed to address me as Kate!" She was now exploded like fireworks before everybody's eyes. "Say it one more time and I _swear_ it will be the _last thing _you ever say in that tongue of yours _after _I tear it out!"

That menacing reply caused a minor shock in Darius. Even Johnson went, "whoa" because the short time he spent with her, he did not take her to be the overly-violent type. Boy, was he wrong. She was frightening when she was pushed over the limit.

Taking a breath, she relaxed her shoulders, and lifted her head high. "If you will not hear the truth from me, then hear it from the source," She shifted her gaze to the right, where 343 Guilty Spark was in the clutches of a Brute Captain, helpless. "Monitor, could you explain to the fool of Halo's purpose?"

Questions. The Monitor _loved_ _questions. He was not going to shut up now. "Collectively, the seven-

Out of great annoyance and hatred, Tartarus tore the Monitor away from his Brute Captain's hands and looked right into its blue eye. "Not another word!"

"Ey, Mohawk!" Tartarus glanced up to see all his enemies before him with weapons in their hands. Except for Katerina, was still fuming. Johnson had a Beam Rifle in his hands, and it aimed directly at Tartarus' big head. "_Please _don't shake the lightbulb." He requested in the most sincere of voices.

That just angered Tartarus's Brutes further as they wanted ever-so badly to kill them all.

"It's just one little shot, Mohawk, I _ain't _got nothin' to lose!"

"Stand down!" He ordered his Brutes.

A satisfied smirk played on Katerina's lips. "Thank you, sergeant," She diverted her attention to Spark again. "The Halos. Can you tell us, once again, why were they created?"

"Weapons of last resort, built by the Forerunners to eliminate potential Flood hosts, thereby rendering the parasite harmless."

Such a speedy reply. "Their creators. The Forerunners. Ultimately, what happened to them?"

"After exhausting every other strategic option, my creators activated the rings. They and all additional sentient life within three radii of the galactic center, _died_, as planned," That took a mouthful so he paused before asking her, "Would you... like to see the relevant data?"

"No, that will do, Guilty Spark. Thank you," She turned her head to Tartarus and said, "_Now _do you understand? There _was _no Great Journey, no nothing. Halo is _just _a weapon, and _nothing more_. The

Prophets were _fools _to think they were the 'chosen ones' of some sorts. And you all were foolish enough to listen to them! Do you _finally _understand? So drop the Index and-

She had no idea how that bulky Brute did it, but in a flash, Tartarus tossed Spark towards them and knocked Johnson down, but with Darius catching him before he could hit the ground.

"Sergeant!" Katerina called out in horror.

Completely distracted, Tartarus then forced Miranda's hands onto the console, the terminal swallowing the Index.

"No, Katerina! The Great Journey has begun!" He declared, grabbing his Fist of Rukt. "And the Brutes shall be the Prophets' escort to salvation!"

The entire Control Room began to tremble with much force. Halo was charging up to fire into the galaxy!

"Not if you all DIE!"

19. Sick

****Halo ****â€œ**** Katerina Duran - "Make It Last: Of Trust and Friendship"****

*** * ***

**><p>Location: Control Room, Installation 05
November 4th, 2552****

Without much thought, Katerina dashed towards the Brutes, dual Energy Swords in hand to chase after Tartarus. Her Elites fired their Plasma Rifles at Tartarus' Brutes to distract them. All bets were off. The last of Katerina's resistance broke and all she wanted was to crush that Chieftain's head with his own Fist of Rukt.

In the center of the Control Room were three layers of platforms. In the center of it all, was Halo's cannon. And it was already generating the energy needed to destroy all sentient life.

However, it was as if that was the last thing on Katerina's mind. "Get BACK here, Tartarus!" She made the leap from the current platform to the center. "Face me if you are brave enough? What, are you frightened that I am going to _destroy _you?!"

Tartarus had his energy shield activated, which told Katerina that she was going to have trouble. She would have to overload the shields first before she could get a clean hit.

"I am not going to just destroy you, Tartarus. I am going to _annihilate _you!" Raw pain and anger flashed in her violet eyes as they stood before each other. "What you did to Micah, I am going to do you _far worseâ€œ|_"

"Ha! I am _begging _you to try your best, Katerin- ah!" What appeared to be a round from a Beam Rifle pinged off Tartarus' shields.

Katerina snapped her neck to the left to find Johnson, standing on the console, aiming his Beam Rifle at Tartarus. "Hey, Mohawk! How does _that _feel?!"

She was _so _happy to have him as a companion!

Despite the slight distraction, Katerina foretold Tartarus' attack and she took a jump backwards to avoid getting whacked by the Fist of Rukt. Another round from Johnson's Beam Rifle connected, to which she took this opportunity to kick him in the face.

An attempt at a slice failed when he knocked one of her Energy Swords out of her hand with his hammer. But she still had the other in her right hand. A slice across his chest weakened the shields, but it was still not enough to break them. That was when Johnson delivered another round from his Beam Rifle, breaking the shields.

"Shields are down!" She heard Johnson yell from a distance. "Let 'em have it, Katerina!"

Blade and hammer collided in the center of the Control Room. Tartarus had not expected Katerina to be so strong for a female Elite. A hard kick to her abdomen and she stumbled backwards, clutching her stomach. That was when Tartarus lifted his hammer high and was about to bring down on her when she swiftly drove her Energy Sword into his chest, eliciting a pained growl from him before pulling it out.

Out of the blue, using just one hand, Tartarus swung the Fist of Rukt at her with much force, sending her spiraling through the air. She was over the ledge but managed to grab onto it with both hands, hanging on for dear life.

Then, Tartarus stood over the ledge, blue blood seeping through his fur, wearing a sick smile on his face. Katerina felt like she was staring into the eyes of Death himself.

Just then, Tartarus' head jerked backwards but he kept his hold on his Fist of Rukt. Unbeknownst to Katerina, Darius had driven his wrist blade into the Brute's back and was maneuvering him away from the ledge.

Immediately, she hefted herself back onto the platform, only to see a fight begin between her son and the Brute responsible for murdering her husband. It ended with Tartarus pushing Darius against a wall using his hammer and hers with Tartarus resumed when she pulled out her Magnum and fired all remaining shots at him.

Enraged even further, he charged for her with the hammer and she grabbed it tightly, preventing him from squashing her with it like a bug.

Katerina needed to act fast. With quick thinking, she activated her wrist blade and penetrated Tartarus' neck with it. His grip on the hammer loosened, leaving her the one to wield it while he stumbled backwards and fell to one knee.

Suddenly, at that moment, she felt as if time had stopped. As if she and this monster in front of her were the only ones left in this Control Room. Memories of that horrible day flooded her mind and all

her heart was telling her was, _"Get revenge"._

Clutching her hand into a fist, she delivered a punch to Tartarus, before using her hoof to press against his wounded chest and pin him to the ground. Now, it was she who was standing over him, with the Fist of Rukt in her hands.

The Chieftain then began to chuckle weakly, highly aware of his imminent death. "So this is how it is, little Kate- oh!" Putting much weight into her hoof, she pressed against his chest wound, hatred flashing in her eyes.

"Whatâ€¦ did I tell youâ€¦ about calling me that?"

"For the sake of old times, little Kateâ€¦ will you not oblige?" And for that, he received another press.

Katerina titled her head at him. "Is this not how Micah was that day? Him under your boot, your precious little hammer in hand, taking your own sweet time to kill him? While you thought the Hunter had taken care of me? The tables have _finally _turned, Tartarus. I will have my revenge for what you and your unit did to my Stateâ€¦" With that, she lifted the Fist of Rukt up high.

In the midst of coughs, he said, "The Great Journey-

"-has ended for you." And she brought it down on his head.

20. Distrust

****Halo ****â€"**** Katerina Duran - "Make It Last: Of Trust and Friendship"****

*** * ***

><p>Location: Onboard the _Shadow of Intent**

>_November 5****th****, 2552****

"You are awake,"

Darius received a sweet, tired smile as a reply. "Good morning, dear. Do not worry â€" I got all the sleep I needed," Katerina returned her gaze to her silver shawl after her son sat opposite her. "I was just cleaning the shawl. Hard to believe after all these years, it is still in excellent condition."

Darius let of a little chuckle at that. "Iâ€¦ honestly think it has something to do with you constantly mending it, mother. Especially with the skills you possess."

She returned the chuckle. "Perhaps! I _am _rather talented. Soâ€¦ where do we stand?"

"Well," He took a deep breath. "The Covenant is in chaos as of now. Those who felt betrayed and no longer wish to follow Truth have come to us. We now have quite the army,"

"That is good news. What of the humans?"

"We have been requested to meet with one of the UNSC's leaders later. A Lord Admiral Hood," He said. "After all, we must come to a truce."

She sighed at that, hovering on the edge of a faked smile. "And I pray it will last. We are no longer part of the Covenant. The humans _must _understand that, right?"

He shrugged his shoulders at her. "We cannot speak for the Loyalists."

"Then we must make the humans understand _who_ their real enemies are."

* * *

><p>Location: Jungle near Mount Kilimanjaro,
Earth
November 17th, 2552**

It was the early hours of dawn. The sun rose in a pool of gold, spilling its light over the land. Right here, deep in the jungles near Mount Kilimanjaro, sunlight barely seeped through the thick layers of the forest, but it enough for Katerina to see the fallen Spartan she assisted.

"This ain't good..."

"Damn... How far did he fall?"

"Two kilometers, easy."

The female Elite's eyes widened with horror. She kept her distance, she and Darius, but dread still washed over her. That was quite the impact. Was he even alive?

She decided not to question that. Over the course of her Covenant service, she had encountered several Spartans, all of them extraordinary. He _had _to be alive. He just _had _to be.

She then heard the marine corpsman saying something about the Spartan's armor and that it could have taken most of the impact, but he was just being doubtful.

The sergeant major, Avery Johnson, one she had forged a friendship with " she watched as he knelt next to the Spartan, one hand on his chest in an attempt to feel for the heartbeat perhaps. However, he then sighed epically, before reaching to the back of the Spartan's helmet and pulling something out.

_I believe in the Spartans. He _has _to be alive!
>

"Radio for VTOL, heavy lift gear. We're not leaving him here."

She watched as Johnson stared at the object in his hand. It appeared to be a data chip of some kind. She had not even realized the armored hand reaching up and gripped Johnson's.

"Yeah. You're _not_."

A small smile spread across Katerina's face at that.

Johnson pulled the Master Chief to his feet, not without chiding him a little like a small child. "Crazy fool! Why do you always _jump_? One of these days, you're gonna land on somethin' as stubborn as you are!" The Spartan received a playful slap to his chest. "And I don't do bits and pieces!"

A giggle came to Katerina, one she was unable to contain. Oh, the sergeant had become her new favorite person.

That drew the attention of John-117 and he immediately caught sight of the mysterious female Elite. If it were any other, he would have swiftly grabbed Johnson's sidearm and aimed it right at her. But she was different. She didn't kill him aboard the _Pillar of Autumn_.

Wearing that helmet meant that Katerina could not read the Spartan's expressions and that was what worried her. Was he angry? Was he puzzled? Did he appear to be distrustful of her? She could not tell.

Johnson waved the data chip in front of the Spartan's face, catching his attention. "Where is she, Chief?" He questioned. "Where's Cortana?"

_Cortana? Is she not his A.I. companion? _

John accepted the empty data chip, glanced at it for a good few seconds before slipping it into the back of his helmet. "She stayed behind." Okay, that question had been answered. Now back to staring at the female Elite.

"Perhaps there is much to explain to you, Spartan, and there will be a time and a place for it," Right now, she spoke in a mild manner. "However now, we must go. This place is home to Covenant Loyalist encampment. The Brutes have our scent."

"Then they must love the smell of badass!" Johnson cheered, handing an Assault Rifle to the Chief.

John accepts the rifle, not taking his eyes off Katerina. He got a better look at her this time. She still had the glossy black-as-night waist-length hair. The same sparkling violet cat-like eyes. This time, she was wearing a gray-colored armor, with a silver shawl draped over her pinned together with a brooch of some design.

All in all, she was still the one who, aboard the _Autumn_, took down a Hunter when it was about to squash the Chief with its heavy metal shield. She was speedy â€" first firing bullets at its exposed midsection and then jumping on its back to buffet its exposed neck with her wrist blade.

"Why did you save me?"

John did not put much thought into that question. It just slipped out of his mouth. He noticed how Katerina looked as if she expected that from him. Heaving a sigh, she took slow steps towards him. "I know that my actions require answers. I understand that. But as of now, we

are in the middle of a Covenant Loyalist camp. We are vulnerable. Please understand, I will tell you whatever you want to know when we leave this place."

She was about to take a left turn when his armored hand gripped her upper right arm, halting her in her tracks and holding her in place. Katerina could not tell how he was right now, but his voice revealed all. "I don't think I can wait that long,"

Firm and threatening.

Darius took one intimidating step forward, raising his Plasma Rifle and aiming it right at John's head. He still did not stop looking into Katerina's eyes. "Release her, Spartan. Now." He demanded.

Johnson placed one gentle hand on the Chief's shoulder. "Come on, now, Chief. Katerina's alright. She's not the enemy. Never was. Wait until we get back to base. Trust me: the explanation will be worth it."

Now, it was Katerina's turn to speak. "You may be distrustful of me all you like, Spartan, but we are all in this together. Like it or not, I will have your back. If you would please release me? You appear a lot stronger than you look."

John knew he was not going to get his answers now. He would have to wait. So he let go of her arm, slowly. Katerina backed away from him and into Darius instead, who was still giving the Spartan a killer look for grabbing his mother like that.

She massaged her arm and took that left turn. "If we may proceed, sergeant?"

21. Not Yet Even

****Halo ****â€"**** Katerina Duran - "Make It Last: Of Trust and Friendship"****

* * *

><p>Location: Jungle near Mount Kilimanjaro,
Earth
November 17th, 2552**

"1st Squad, you're my scouts. Katerina, watch the Chief's back."

Whoa, whoa. When did this become a thing? The Master Chief was just about to voice out his opinion when it dawned upon him that it would be useless to argue, given the current situation they were in. He shot a quick glance at Darius and Katerina Duran, who was standing behind him with an innocent look on her face.

Looks can be and will always be deceiving.

Sergeant Johnson, his longtime friend, had stated that the explanation was worth it. Was it going to be? Right now, all of them had to get to the extraction point. Yet, John could not shake this feeling of discomfort off him. Not when Katerina was around and he

did not get his explanation.

While his mind was in a conflict about this, he heard Johnson getting on the COM channel to a Bravo Team, telling them to fall back to the extraction point. It wasn't long before trouble started to brew, with a Sergeant Reynolds from Bravo Team attempting to reach Johnson but to no avail. There was something about a Brute Pack, though.

"Phantom," Katerina whispered to everyone present, her eyes dotting upward to the skies.

An irritated 'tsk' came to Johnson before he said, "We stick together, we're gonna get spotted. We'll split up, and meet back at the LZ," He concluded. Turning his head to the Master Chief, he then said, "Chief, go with Katerina and head toward the river. 2nd Squad, you're with me."

Wait, couldn't they at least talk about this?

* * *

><p>Laterâ€|

This Magnums-wielding female Elite was really something.

In the last few battles, she had taken out more Covenant Loyalists than he could count. Be it using her twin Magnums or twin Energy Swords. He had never seen a female Elite before, let alone one in action so this was really something. Almost like she was stealing his thunder.

So far, they had lost contact with Sergeant Johnson after his Pelican was shot down - the Pelican meant to extract everyone out of this jungle. Travelling forward, they all reached a low cliff and a dam was in sight â€" a dam filled with Covenant Loyalists.

Katerina gave a soft gasp. "Spartan, look!" She called for him.

Taking it cautiously, he walked up to her side, to view a Brute Chieftain beating Johnson on the far left in front of a tiny building.

"Oh, Sergeantâ€| we must rescue him!" She turned her head to the Chief. "Come! We must battle our way across the dam to reach him!"

She spun around to make a move, with the Chief staring at her with awe. She really did care about Johnson. What, were they best buddies now? Man, she was full of mysteries.

Katerina then paused and turned her head to him. "Unlessâ€| you have a plan to rescue all of them, Spartan."

Now she was asking for his opinion?

"No. Let's just go get them back safe and sound."

"As you wish."

The Chief, Katerina, Darius and three remaining Marines hurried to the dam, catching the Covenant Loyalists by surprise. Katerina headed straight for the Brute Chieftain while the rest of them handled his minions. By the time it was over, John found Katerina standing over the Chieftain's body, blue blood on her right wrist blade. She was staring at it with the coldest of eyes for a few good seconds, before returning to her son.

"They should be in here!" Darius pointed to that same building.

Running inside, they found Johnson and three other marines behind a plasma shield. Catching sight of the Chief and Katerina, Johnson got to his feet with a little struggle.

"Sergeant!"

"This isn't as fun as it looks," He commented. "Release the shield, would ya?"

A single touch to the plasma shield's control unit and it disintegrated. Katerina and Darius tossed any Covenant weapons that was scattered around them to Johnson and his marines.

"Is there any other means of escape?" She asked Johnson.

"Don't worry â€" we're good," So saying, he got on the COM Channel. "Kilo 023, what's your ETA?"

"Imminent, Sergeant. Find some cover. Gotta clear a path."

"Roger that, Hocus," To everyone present, he said, "Friendly gunship, coming in hot!"

"Yet it does not mean we are safe," Katerina gazed outside of the busted windows. "Phantoms!"

"Hocus!" Johnson yelled over the COM.

"I see 'em! Standby! Going loud! Everyone down!"

"You heard the man!"

Katerina hung onto Darius for dear life as the ground began to tremble. Although the two Phantoms had arrived and were releasing reinforcements, Pelican Kilo 23 manages to swoop in and let loose a missile barrage. One of the two Phantoms exploded in an intense coruscation of firework, killing any reinforcements that were just dropped off as well.

"Scratch one Phantom!"

For the second Phantom, Kilo 23 fired two missile barrages and it plunged into the river. "Scratch two!" Kilo 23 lowered itself to the dam for pickup. Finally. All of them hurry to the pelican and practically jumped into it.

As the pelican took off, everyone took a comfortable seat, except for John and Katerina, who were glancing down at the jungle below

them.

"You did good,"

Katerina curved her head to the Spartan, her big violet cat-like eyes widened.

"But we're still not even."

* * *

><p>AN: Thumbs up for a crappy chapter?
>

**I do apologize. I seem to have lost my inspiration for this fic. I can however tell you that the next chapter will be better! **

22. Back and Forth

Halo **â€"**** Katerina Duran - "Make It Last: Of Trust and Friendship" **

* * *

><p>Location: UNSC base Crow's Nest, Kenya, Africa,
Earth
November 17th, 2552**

Crow's Nest â€" the base was built for a war in the 20th century. Due to its age, the base required frequent maintenance and this highly annoyed many of the UNSC personnel.

Even so, it seemed like the best base the UNSC had for now.

Katerina and Darius had been to the base multiple times, mostly to visit Commander Miranda Keyes and discuss plans. Right now, they were returning with Sergeant Johnson and the Master Chief who was safe and sound, and still highly distrustful of Katerina and her son.

It was going to take a long time for the distrust to disappear. It might not even happen as far as Katerina was concerned.

Stepping out of the pelican, the group was greeted by Commander Miranda Keyes. Johnson and the Chief stood before her, with Katerina and Darius behind them.

"Where'd you find him?"

"Napping. Out back." A smile came to both Katerina and Miranda.

Miranda reached forward and shook hands with John. With that, they all began to move into the base, with Miranda relaying the whole story to the Chief.

Down the hallways of the base, wounded Marines lay against the walls, some even being carried away on stretchers. Katerina saddened at the sight of it all, seeing the damage Truth had cause. All the more reason to go after him.

"The Prophet of Truth's ships breached the Lunar perimeter. Smashed what was left of the Home Fleet. Terrestrial casualties from the subsequent bombardment were extreme. Truth could've landed anywhere, but he committed all his forces here. East Africa. The ruins of New Mombasa. Then, they started digging."

A sudden realization came to the Chief. "What about Halo?"

By now, all of them were in the control room of the base, facing one of the giant monitors. "We stopped it, but only temporarily. Now, the Prophet of Truth is looking for something called 'The Ark', where he'll be able to fire all the Halo Rings." She then took a more serious tone. "If he succeeds, Humanity, The Covenant, every sentient being in the Galaxy..."

John had his own grim tone. "The rings will kill us all."

Nothing new.

A technician to Katerina's left then said, "Ma'am, I have Lord Hood."

"Patch him through."

Admiral Lord Terrence Hood then appeared on the large monitor. Katerina and Darius had met with him a few times. She found that he was a fair human, who accepted her explanation about her being in the Covenant, her past with Truth and assisting the Chief onboard the Pillar of Autumn, just like Sergeant Johnson did.

He acknowledged the Chief, before turning his attention to Katerina and her eldest son. "Katerina,"

"Admiral Lord Hood," Katerina said with a nod.

John shot a quick glance at both of them. Wait, those two were friends too?

Lord Hood began to address the group. "The Commander's come up with a good plan. But without you, I wasn't sure we could pull it off."

Miranda then went on to explaining how Truth's ships were directly above the excavation site, with Anti-Aircraft Batteries surrounding the perimeter. "But, if we neutralize one of the batteries, punch a hole in Truth's defenses..."

It sounded like a plan to Lord Hood. "I'll initiate a low-level strike. Hit 'em right where it hurts. I only have a handful of ships, Master Chief. It's a big risk. But I'm confident-"

Just then, the base was swallowed by darkness, a result of the power getting cut. Katerina hung onto her son and then heard someone yell, "Hell! Not again!" in major annoyance, while Miranda ordered for the emergency generators.

"Shielding failed! They're down and charging."

This was not good. Katerina was having a really bad feeling about this. Like this was not just a simple power outage. It was as

if-

"_You are, all of you, vermin!"_

Goddamn it.

The lights were still out in the base, but the Prophet of Truth was plastered over all monitor screens, much to Katerina's dismay and disgust. Her head darted from left to right, finding that he had overtaking _all _the screens.

"_Cowering in the dirt, thinking what, I wonder? That you might escape the coming fire?"_

Katerina was not aware she was squeezing the arm of her son at this point.

"_No! Your world will _burn_ until its surface is but glass! And neither will you, Katerina, nor your _Demon_ will live to creep!"_

It was just a message. She knew that. So how did he perfectly manage to look her way when he was talking about her?

"Truth, you bas-"

"Mother!" Darius grabbed her by her upper arms gently. "Be calm. It is but a useless message."

Katerina pulled away from his grip though, highly annoyed, her violet eyes blazing with anger as they glued to the screen.

That was genuine hatred on Katerina's face, John knew that.

"_Blackened from its hole to mar the reflection of our passage... the culmination of our Journey... For your destruction is the will of the gods! And Iâ€|? I _am_ their instrument!" _

Katerina was just about ready to give a mouthful when Truth disappeared from the screens and the lights returned to the base. She closed her eyes and took deep breaths.

Johnson was so not impressed with Truth tough. "Cocky bastard... Just loves to run his mouth."

"Does he usually mention me?" The Spartan questioned causally.

Katerina would have said, "You have no idea", but she was still far too irritated. She glanced away from the biggest monitor screen, her thoughts running wild. She did hear Miranda say something about 'closing shop' meaning to evacuate the base. She had a point â€" if Truth managed to broadcast his stupid message, what are the odds of him already sending reinforcements to Crow's Nest?

"The wounded," Miranda said to the sergeant. "We're getting them _all_ out."

A half-smile came to Johnson. "If I have to carry 'em myself," He

then turned his attention to John. "The Marines downstairs could use your help, Chief. Katerina, go with him. Your kid and I can handle things here."

John narrowed his eyes at the Sergeant though he could not see it. _Why _was he intentionally pairing him up with her? Damn it, Johnson.

Chasing a quick glance at John, Katerina nodded to Darius. "If that is the sergeant's wish. Stay strong, my boy,"

"And you, mother. Spartan," Darius' apple-green eyes tore right through the Master Chief. "Look out for my mother."

Did he have a choice?

Looking at Katerina again, John began to move the stairs with Katerina following close behind. The moment the both of them were out of sight and heading down the steps, she told him, "It appears you would have to wait a little longer for your explanation, Spartan, and I apologize for it."

He kept his back to her. "Problems seem to be piling over each other. It's okay. But I still can't trust you or your son. Not yet."

She bit her bottom lip at that. "I understandâ€|" She needed to clear the air, even if it was just a little. "However, I can take a short moment to tell you that my son and I were forced into the Covenant."

If Katerina had not been paying attention, when John halted in his tracks, she would have bumped into him. "Forced?" He only turned his head to her.

"30 years ago. We had no choice. My familyâ€|" She shut her mouth instantly. "I think that briefly shows where I have always stood in this war."

He shook his head slightly. "Not really. I still don't know the full story." He said matter-of-factly.

She decided to try again, her violet eyes big and innocent. "Your sergeant does and he trusts me. I have faith that you will too."

"We'll see about that."

Back and forth - that's how it going to be.

23. Boom

Halo **â€"**** Katerina Duran - "Make It Last: Of Trust and Friendship"**

* * *

><p>Location: UNSC base Crow's Nest, Kenya, Africa,
Earth
November 17th, 2552**

"Chief! Get back to the Ops Center. Kill those Brutes and rearm the bomb. Arbiter, go with him! I've gotta get these men outta here, but I'll radio with another exit. Good luck to the both of you."

"Mother!"

"Leave, my boy! You must assist these men! I will be fine!" Katerina said in what appeared to be a small cry. "We will be reunited once again! Just _go_! Return to the _Oath _once you are done!"

Crow's Nest had been attacked and overtaken by a large contingent of Covenant Loyalists. The numbers game kicked in; there was no way the UNSC could defend the base. So Commander Miranda Keyes ordered a time bomb placed in the command center, only to be defused by more Covenant Loyalists. Now it was John and Katerina's job to go back in there and rearm the damn thing, much to Darius' despair.

"Once the bomb is armed, we won't have much time. So get ready to move, got it?" The Chief knew he did not need to tell her that, but the last thing he wanted was for this female Elite to be left behind, leaving him without his explanation and a son to grieve for his mother.

"Of course, Spartan," She answered loyally. He was _starting _to acknowledge her at least. One step at a time.

The Ops center only had a Brute Chieftain and a handful of Grunts, which did not make any sense to Katerina, but it was going to make their job all the more easier. A single bullet from Katerina's magnum and the Brute Chieftain caught it right in his face. This greatly startled the Grunts and sent them running up and down for their lives. The Chief and the Arbiter made quick work of them.

There the bomb was, unarmed and looking extremely ugly. At least, to Katerina. The Spartan glanced at her, as if questioning whether she was ready to run or not.

She gave a single nod.

Alarms blared throughout the base, almost deafening Katerina who gave a squeak. "That did it!" Sergeant Johnson got on the COM channel and barked their next orders to them. "We got your exit - a service elevator in the hangar. Head downstairs, cut through the caves! Move it, you two!"

That was the plan! The two began to run like hell, with John leading them. Grunts, Jackals and Drones were scattering everywhere, oblivious to their presence. That was good, because they didn't exactly have the time to stop and shoot them.

The two practically dive into the elevator once it caught their eye. John activated the elevator and the doors proceed to close, but not fully though. Something on the other side exploded violently, sending flames through the doors.

The Chief reached forward and pulled Katerina to him by her upper right arm. "Careful!" The elevator then finally began to descend.

Just when they began to think that they were out of harm's way, their ears pick up a massive 'boom'. Glancing up, fire was roaring through the half-closed doors and towards them. The elevator began to tremble violently and they felt it plummeting at an unnatural speed.

The last thing John heard was Katerina's screams before blacking out.

* * *

><p>Location: Underground Garage

"-rtan! Spartan, wake up! Come on, wake up!"

A petrified but sweet voice was telling him to wake up, so he did.

When Katerina saw that his head was shifting, she knew he was finally awake after being knocked out cold. "Finally! Duran's sake, are you alright? Can you sit up?" She questioned with much concern, tugging on his left arm.

Nothing felt broken. So with Katerina's help, he managed to sit up successfully. "What happened?" He asked.

It didn't bother her that he did not thank her for helping him sit up. "I do not know. My guess would be that the bomb went off sooner than expected. We seem to be in some underground garage," She said, glancing around. "We have some wounded and healthy Marines with us too."

Looking around, he saw that she was right: it was an underground garage, dimly-lit with Marines and Warthogs scattered everywhere.

"Commander Keyes had been attempting to contact us," Katerina continued. "She requires for us to head to the town of Voi."

"We'll need to get out of here first," He said, getting up to his feet, not looking at her. "Most importantly, we need to get the 3 who are wounded out."

"Yes, I know. We are attempting to find the emergency power," She told him gently. "Once we have, we can all leave in these Warthogs. Some of them are still functional."

"Good," That was all he could say.

The emergency power kicked in at that point and the lights became decently brighter. They all worked on getting the 3 wounded Marines in the Troop Transporter variant of the Warthog.

"I can command the vehicle carrying the wounded Marines, if you wish," Katerina said, as if seeking permission.

_Hold up. _"â€| You can drive a Warthog?" He asked, shocked out of his mind.

"Your Scorpion Tanks are actually a personal favorite of mine, but yes, I can command a Warthog. Would you like me to commandeer the one

with the wounded Marines? Or will you rather have me do something else? Like command your vehicle's turret?"

The mysterious female Elite can drive Human vehicles. John did not even know why he was surprised. She did mention being in the Covenant for 30 years. So it was only natural that she picked up a thing or two along the way.

"No," He finally said. "Just drive the wounded out. The rest of us will keep you covered."

"As you wish."

* * *

><p>AN: *gasp* Is this an update?
>

**My apologize for the 2 week wait! My part-time job is sucking the life out of me :/ **

24. Slow Process

Halo **â€"**** Katerina Duran - "Make It Last: Of Trust and Friendship"**

* * *

><p>Location: Underground Garage of UNSC base Crow's Nest, Kenya, Africa, Earth
November 17th, 2552**

"Before anything else, I thinkâ€| I ought to start treating you like a person. How can I address you?"

"Oh! Um well, my name is more than enough. If it is a mouthfulâ€| I suppose you may address me as 'Kate'."

"Not Arbiter?"

"Ifâ€| you must, then go ahead. Although I would not prefer it-"

"'Katerina' it is, then. Get moving."

* * *

><p>Getting to the town of Voi was the plan right now. With John leading, he, Katernia Duran and several marines, both healthy and wounded, drove out of the underground tunnels successfully. Katerina's warthog was carrying the wounded marines, so she was driving behind the Chief at a cautious manner.<p>

The warthogs made sure that, along the way, they left no Covenant Loyalist alive. John kept turning his head back to see if Katerina was still in one piece. And she was. In fact, she was concentrating so hard on not making the warthog ride bumpy for the wounded marines, as well as avoiding any battles.

Just then, their COM channels pick up a distress signal, citing that

a convoy at Tsavo Highway had been invaded by Covenant Loyalists and required immediate assistance. "If they are nearby, we should assist them, Spartan," Katerina said over the channel.

"Agreed." Was all he could reply with.

The Warthogs finally arrived at the Highway, encountering several infantry hostiles and if that was not enough, there were also Brute Choppers added to the mix.

"Keep the wounded away!" The Chief barked to Katerina over the COM channel.

* * *

><p>Soonâ€|

"You drive a warthog pretty well. I'm guessing you learnt to drive it over the course of your Covenant career?"

Katerina was in the passenger seat, with John driving the warthog and a marine manning the turret. Another warthog was following close behind. The wounded Katerina's warthog had been carrying were at the Supply Convoy, being treated.

His question and the way he spoke to her surprised her. He was calm, but that might be because he was concentrating on the road. Either way, she was happy that he wasn't treating her with much suspicion.

"Thank you for the compliment, Spartan. And yes, I did. It was not easy but I learnt."

"_Commander. This is ONI Recon One-Eleven. The cruisers above- they found-" _

_"Say again, Recon? You're breaking up." _

"There's something in the crater, Ma'am. Something beneath the storm."

A slight gasp came from Katerina's lips. "It's Commander Keyes!"

"What was that about a storm?" John questioned.

"I do not knowâ€| but I fear it is the Ark- WHOA!"

Katerina was taken by surprise when the Chief hit the brakes out of the blue. The reason being, the bridge they had been taking had a gap.

"Sorry," He said to her softly. "But it looks like we're leaving the Warthogs behind."

She straightened her waist-length glossy black hair as well as her right-sided fringe, after it was all messed up from the ride. "If we must,"

Just then, Miranda got on the COM channel, addressing the Spartan and

Elite. "Master Chief? Arbiter? Finally, a good connection! Truth has excavated a Forerunner Artifact. We have to assume it's The Ark."

"Oh no!" A sigh left Katerina's mouth.

"Keep pushing to the town of Voi, you two!" Sergeant Johnson joined in. "Resupply birds will meet you in the next valley."

* * *

<p>Soon!"

Once the Chief, Katerina and their marines successfully crossed the gap, they found several Marines pinned down under heavy fire by Covenant loyalists in the next sector. If that was not enough, Phantoms came in to join the fun and drop off reinforcements, as well as a Wraith.

The group was lacking in heavy weapons or vehicles. So as John and Katerina were taking over behind a large rock, he asked her, "Katerina, does your armor have a cloaking system?"

"Yes, but it will only activate for a short while!" She replied, reloading her twin Magnums.

"Then you better have the best sneak skills in the universe, because I need you to take out that Wraith."

Her violet cat-like eyes could not get any bigger. "WHAT."

"Or you can board it and claim it. Up to you."

"Can we not stop and talk about this?!"

* * *

<p>AN: Thought I'd let this chapter show the slow process of the Chief beginning to trust Kate. In the next chapter, I'll be exploring it a little more!

25. New Job

Halo **!"**** Katerina Duran - "Make It Last: Of Trust and Friendship"**

* * *

<p>Location: Voi, Kenya, Africa,
November 17th, 2552**

"Well, now that wasn't so bad, was it?"

"Excuse my tone!" but if you are highly amused by my misfortune with the Wraith!" STOP IT. It was _not _fun at all!"

"I have no idea what you mean."

"You are lucky you wear a helmet, because I cannot tell whether or not you are concealing a smile."

A small smile was indeed on John's lips. "Look, you did good. But right now, we're moving onto bigger things."

"Oh?"

"This Warthog convoy's moving to Voi and we're to punch through the Covenant Loyalist Anti-Aircraft defenses that surround the Ark," The Master Chief said, looking out at the row of Warthogs. "It'll allow Lord Hood's fleet of ships to passage to Truth's fleet so we can kill him."

"Oh," Katerina sounded disappointed and he took note of that. "I was hoping that _I _could be the one who ends his miserable life."

"He must've done something _really _drastic to piss you off."

A small faked laugh came to her. "More than you will ever know."

"Is it all in the explanation you're yet to give me?"

She nodded. "Yes."

"Good. Then get in. You're driving."

* * *

><p>Laterâ€|

"What's that sound?"

"It's getting closer!"

"Oh, this can't be good man..."

"Scarab! Find some cover. Now!"

"Oh no!" Katerina exclaimed once the oversized tank caught her eye.

"Run for it!" John motioned for her to move first. The last thing he needed for her to die.

The Scarab tore through the factory, taking with it the bridge John and Katerina were just standing on. That was too close.

"New Mombasa all over againâ€|" He mumbled under his breath, lifting the Missile Pod he had in his hands up high, eyeing the Scarab. "I'll need to get inside and take out its power core. Will you watch my back while I help take out its legs?"

"But of course, Spartan. Whatever you require of me."

A part of him honestly wanted to trust her completely, but he knew it would be still a slow process. He didn't mean to be cold towards her in the beginning of it all, but not too many Covenant soldiers would save a UNSC Spartan's life, so nobody could blame him for his skepticism.

But in just this _one _day, she's proven to be highly skilled at Human weapons and vehicles, and not to mention athletic. She may appear to be a quiet and humble female Elite, but there was a soldier inside of her.

She also had thisâ€¦ this hidden rage inside of her that he only saw glimpses of whenever she ran into Covenant Loyalists, more so whenever they would run into any holograms of Truth. However, the last hologram she spotted, she flipped it over. She really _hated _that Prophet like poison. _What _exactly did he do to her that caused her and Darius to join the Covenant with no other choice?

He still needed to wait for his explanation, though.

* * *

><p>Laterâ€¦

The very last target was a Covenant AA gun. Take it down and Hood could successfully start his attack run. Reaching to it was no easy task; there must have been dozens of Covenant Loyalists looking to stop them from succeeding. John, Katerina and the surviving Marines they had with them put everything they had into destroying the AA gun, giving Hood the green light to attack.

John and Katerina were standing on a cliff side, overlooking The Artifact with the Forerunner Dreadnought at the center of it. Multiple Longswords, three UNSC frigates including the _UNSC Forward Unto Dawn_, and _The Diary of Oath_, Katerina's Assault Carrier which she regained, streaked overhead.

"All ships: fire at will!"

The Frigates engage the Dreadnought with their MAC guns and explosions cover the Dreadnought's surface. Not even a little scratch.

"What is that thing made of?" Katerina questioned out loud.

Just then, the Forerunner structure began to open like a starfish, with the Dreadnought being lowered into it. What appeared to be an energy beam from the skies began to focus on it, and it grew broader by the second.

"Thisâ€¦ is _not _good!" Katerina exclaimed.

"Let's find some cover! Come on!" John grabbed her by her arm and pulled her to him. They took shelter behind a large horizontal rock as the energy beam released a sudden shockwave.

Once they felt the shockwave subside, the Master Chief and Katerina peered over the rockâ€¦ only to witness an enormous black sphere outlined with blue hover in the sky above The Artifact. Every single ship in the air was left disorganized.

"What in the name of Duranâ€¦" Katerina gaped, eyes fixed on the sphere.

Lord Hood got on the COM, distraught and coughing. "What did Truth

just do? Did he activate the rings?!"

Commander Miranda Keyes got on the COM as well, managing to supply with an answer. "No, sir, but he certainly did something..."

The Spartan and the Elite watched as the Dreadnought took flight and disappeared into the sphere, followed by several Covenant Loyalist ships.

"Evac wounded and regroup! Wherever Truth went-"

"Sir, new contact - slipping in!"

A heavily-damaged CCS-class battlecruiser emerged from Slipspace just behind John and Katerina. The cruiser was emitting smoke as it flew over them, before losing altitude and crashing to the ground, completely out of their sight. The crash caused a great rumble, but what was onboard the ship?

"What is onboard that battlecruiser?" Katerina asked, wondering if he even had an answer or not. "Do you think they could be Brutes?"

No. The Chief knew _exactly _was it was. And he did not like it one bit. "Worse. The Flood."

Katerina was standing behind him, so John did not see the stunned expression on her face. Her silence was what made him turn his head to her. When he did, she was keeping her gaze on the area where the battlecruiser was to have crashed. She was also taking deep breaths.

"You okay?" He asked.

"Huh? Oh, yes! Yes, I am!"

He should have known right there that she was lying, but he didn't. "Then I think we've got a job on our hands."

26. It Followed Me Home

Halo **â€"**** Katerina Duran - "Make It Last: Of Trust and Friendship"**

* * *

><p>Location: Voi, Kenya, Africa, Earth
November 17th, 2552**

The Flood. The _Flood _was here. On Earth. And Katerina's heart was ready to give out twice over. Why wouldn't the horror stop? Why did it have to follow her and remind her of what had happened to Vers-

"You and I aren't new at this. We know what the Flood are capable of. So let's stick together, alright?"

_As if I would wish to be alone right now. _"Yes, Spartan."

"Great. Let's go. We'll need to find that crashed ship and overload

its engines."

It was taking every fiber of Katerina's being not to freak out like she did when she was hunting for the Heretic Leader and the Index. She did not want to appear weak in front of the supersoldier and neither did she want him to come to know of her fear of the Flood. She would just have to shut her mouth and fire her Magnums or swing her Energy Swords.

When the two re-entered the city, their COM channels picked up several Marines transactions, some of them even screaming in pain. They knew that those Marines needed their help. "Let's move, Katerina," John said to her, picking up his speed. "They need us."

_They do not stand a chance, Spartan. Nobody can. I do not know how _I _managed to survive, but I wish it could have been Versera instead of me. _

"There!" He pointed to a Marine squad at a loading ramp. A few more were standing outside of a building.

_"There! Over there! We're surrounded, Sergeant!" _

_"Aaaaah!" _

_"Fall back, fall back!" _

"Sergeant, come on!"

Infection Forms and Combat Forms then descended from above out of the blue and began to swarm those the Marines at the ramp. They were simply too quick for John and Katerina to react in time. Her violet eyes widened in horror and her stomach turned into ice. It wasn't until the Chief started firing his Assault Rifle that she snapped back into reality and fired her weapons as well.

Katerina knew there was more where that came from. She cursed herself for being right when a new wave of Flood forms began their attack on them all. She wondered how she managed to contain her emotions right now.

Making quick work of the wave, John, Katerina and the remaining marines headed into the warehouse. They hear gunfire and quickly spot several Marines pinned down behind sandbags, fighting off a large amount of several Flood forms " Infection, Carrier, Marine, Brute" Once that sector had been cleared, the Spartan and the Elite found themselves to be the only ones standing.

John glanced around to see that was true, and he saw found Katerina staring at all the dead bodies, jaw dropped and he did not notice, but there were tears in her eyes. "You okay?"

"Huh?" She turned her head to him. "Oh, yes! Yes, I am" fine" Let us continue." She said quickly, moving into the next warehouse, not giving the Spartan any chance to say anything.

The next sector required them to head up some stairs so as to continue their journey on the upper floor. On the upper floors itself, they saw two Marines, one wielding a Flamethrower, attempting

to fight off some more Flood forms, but fail terribly.

Before they could head up the stairs though, several Flood forms surrounded the two on the ground for itself. They began to engage their enemies, which forced the two to separate and stand far from each other as they fired at those Flood forms. Katerina had not realized that.

When she put a bullet into a Marine form, she thought it was over until a screech from above caught her off guard and she found her back pinned to the ground with a Brute Combat Form on top of her. She lost possession of her two Magnums as a result and struggled to keep the thing off her.

"Get off ME!" She shrieked as loud as possible, fear completely taking over her. "No! Stop, please!"

When she suddenly felt the weight off her, she sat up instantly and dragged herself until her back was against a wall. She covered her head with her hands and the tears began to flow.

She did not even know that it was John who had pulled the Brute Combat Form off her and finished it off, coming to her rescue like a knight in green armor. She kept cowering and whimpering softly.

Katerina then felt something touch her arm. She yelped out of panic, but calmed when she was face-to-face with an orange visor.

"Katerina, it's me!"

A wave of relief washed over at that sight. She breathed out heavily, hands over her heart.

John was not going to miss the glistening tears this time. He did something he didn't think he'd do: he gave her his hand. "You alright?"

She nodded frantically, timidly taking his hand. "Yes. Thank you."

With very little effort, he pulled her up to her feet, staring at her. She wiped away her tears and walked past him to pick up her fallen Magnums. She was shaking.

The Chief did not know much about this Elite. All he knew was that she was supposed to be a member of the Covenant but instead, she assisted the Humans whenever possible, just like how she saved him. She had one son. That was all he knew, so he was not determined to be friends with her or anything.

But the way she reacted to the Flood? He might have to get a little personal. "Are you _sure _you're okay?"

She got to her knees to pick up her weapons. "Y-yes. Why would I not be?"

She was kidding herself. He knew it. It was written all over her. "Let me try this again: are you _frightened _of the Flood?"

She froze at that. "No. No I am not. Thatâ€¦ hideous creature simply took me by surprise!"

The cracking of her honey voice, the stammeringâ€¦ she was not fooling him. "You're traumatized,"

"I am not!" She raised her tone in defense. "I-I apologize but no, I am not. I simplyâ€¦ dislike them." More tears were coming to her. "Now may we please proceed? Please?"

Katerina said that last word in a pleading manner. He decided not to press it further. "Fine."

Heading up the stairs, John grabbed the fallen Flamethrower and the two jumped through a large hole on that level, only to be greeted by another wave of Flood. When Katerina spotted them, she gasped in shock, almost having a heart attack. As the Chief used the Flamethrower on them, she took shelter by standing behind him, still traumatized by her earlier encounter.

They immediately enter a large room which was actually previously used as an Aid Station, only to discover the mutated bodies of Marinesâ€¦ and a lone uninfected Marines huddling in the far corner, a Magnum in his hand.

"I...I didn't have a choice...!" He then blurted out. "The L.T... The Sergeant...They were all infected! I could see it crawling... sliding around beneath their skin!"

John unhurriedly saw down the Flamethrower and turned his head to Katerina to motion for her to hold her position. He took the slowest of steps to the marine.

"A-and then they got up...they s-started to talk! Oh, God! Their voices! Oh, God! No, make them stop! I did them a favor...y-yeah that's it; I helped them! Maybe...maybe I need to help myselfâ€¦"

"Take it easy, marine," The Chief told him calmly, raising his hands. "There's no need to-"

With much swiftness, the marine brought the Magnum to his head and fired, his body slumped against the bloodstained wall.

Katerina gave a gasp, her hands over her mouth. John lowered his head at the sight of the marine, and then turned his attention to Katerina when he heard her fall to her knees.

She hung her head low, attempting to conceal a sob. "Katerina. Seriously. You shouldn't be out here, if you've been traumatized before. You can leave the Flood to me."

"And what will I do, Spartan?" She suddenly shot back. "Run off? I will still be hunted! And I do not wish to be hunted down like food, just like how Versera was!" She then shrieked.

"â€¦ Who's Versera?"

The realization of her folly came to her. "Forget I said anything."

And she turned her head away.

John walked up to her and got to one knee to get to her level. "Was he a friend to fall to the Flood?" He questioned gently. If she was truly traumatized, he had to help her. She was his only ally and she was a tough fighter.

She shut her eyes tightly and that brought new tears. "Noâ€ he was my sonâ€"

That couldn't be right. "You had 2 sons? They both joined the Covenant with you?"

"â€ Yesâ€ He wasâ€ consumed shortly before I encountered you. I had to kill himâ€" She finally made (somewhat) eye contact with the Spartan. "That is why I am _so _terrified of the Flood. Memories having to murder him-"

"Whoa," He stopped her right there. "You didn't murder your son. He wasn't even your son anymore; he was a Flood form."

"Perhaps he was to _you_. But to me? He was my youngest son."

Nobody should lose a child. Yet she did, and she had to watch him die. John then felt something for her he didn't think he would feel â€ he felt compassionate.

27. Beginning to Trust

Halo â€ Katerina Duran - "Make It Last: Of Trust and Friendship"

* * *

><p>Location: Voi, Kenya, Africa, Earth
November 17th, 2552**

Just as they were about to head out to the lake bed where the destroyed Scarab still stood in place, John needed to say something. He stopped in his tracks, with Katerina almost bumping into his back.

"Is something wrong?" Katerina questioned, her voice broken.

He turned his head to her. "Look, I'm sorry for your loss."

"â€ Huh?" She sounded as if she was dazed.

"Your son," This time, he faced his whole body to her. "Nobody deserves to lose a child. Not like that. But you can't continue thinking that you murdered him. You _didn't_."

She glanced at the ground briefly, processing his words. "It is most kind of you to console me, Spartan, but it will not change what had happened. This act I committed will haunt until my last day."

"Katerina-"

_ "Hail, humans, and take heed! This is the carrier Shadow of Intent." _

Their conversation was going to have to wait. Above them, in the night sky hovered the _Shadow of Intent_.

"Rtas?" Katerina called out for him over the COM channel.

_ "Clear this sector, Katerina, while we deal with the Flood! We are sending you reinforcements." _

Katerina was quite relieved to hear that. She was thankful for John's presence, but she just did not want to be alone at all right now. So the more, the merrier.

Several Orbital Insertion Pods come plummeting from high above, landing on a small cliff below them. The pods opened up, revealing one Major Elite and 4 Special Operations Elite.

_ "Mother, are you there?" _

Katerina's face lit up instantly upon hearing that voice on the COM channels. "Darius?"

"The Flood - are you alright?" His tone easily indicated how anxious he was.

"Yes," She managed to exhale. "Yes, I am. The Spartan was very valiant; I was not frightened at all."

A brief silence and the Elite extended the link to John. "Then you have my thanks, Spartan. I am grateful you watched over my mother."

"Sure."

"Dar," She continued. "Are you still taking control of the _Diary of Oath_?"

"Yes, mother. We are attempting to regain control after that shockwave, but I believe we will be alright. What about you and the Spartan?"

"We must make our way to the Flood ship and destroy it. You need not worry about me, dear. Make sure that the _Oath_ continues to function; I do not want to lose her again."

"And you will not, mother. Stay vigilant."

"As always."

The connection was cut and Katerina released another breath of air, probably in an attempt to ease herself for the next battle with the Flood. As the duo began to move towards the Elite lance, she then said, "I hang onto him as much as I can," That caused the Chief to turn his head to her. "Even more so after Versera's death."

"How did he doing?"

"Males do everything they can to conceal their emotions," She said.

"I truly do not know how he feels and perhaps will never know. His only concern was me."

"Well, you are his mother," He pointed out causally. "Don't blame him for putting you before him."

Somehow, she managed to smile at that. Once they reached the Elites, she quickly asked the obvious question. "My brothers! Why is this happening? How did this even happen?"

"High Charity has fallen, Arbiter!" The Major Elite answered. "It has become a dreaded hive!

"And the fleet? Has quarantine been broken?"

"A single ship broke through our line, mother, and we gave chase. We had to."

"This makes no sense!" She exclaimed. "We had a fleet of hundreds!"

"The Flood, Arbiter," A Special Operations Elite said with much dread in his voice. "It has evolved."

"Oh no! "

"And it'll get worse if we don't get to the crash site now," John said. "Let's move!"

* * *

><p>Soon...

"Chief, the Elites are looking for something. We didn't believe them when they told us!" Fighting through what felt like endless waves of infected, Commander Miranda Keyes' voice then popped up in the COM Channels.

Sergeant Johnson then tuned in with the news: "It's Cortana, Chief! She's on that ship! Find her! Get her out!"

The Master Chief halted in his tracks at that. Katerina did the same. "What?" She questioned out loud. "But you said that your A.I. companion had stayed behind-"

"Let's keep moving!" He ordered immediately.

* * *

><p>Location: Bridge of the *_Shadow of Intent_*

Shipmaster Rtas 'Vadum sat on his gravity throne at one end of the bridge with Darius and another Spec Ops Elite at his side. Opposite him stood Admiral Hood and Commander Miranda Keyes. All that stood between the humans and Elites was a long table where 343 Guilty Spark was working on Cortana's memory unit recovered by John. He and Katerina stood side by side in the middle of it all.

Rtas 'Vadum leaned forward, about to question Guilty Spark. "Will it

live, Oracle? Can it be saved?"

Guilty Spark halted his repairs for a second to address the Elite. "Uncertain. This storage device has suffered considerable trauma. Its matrices are highly unstable."

Lord Hood had this black face on the whole time and Katerina found it noticeable. "Perhaps one of our technicians--"

"That will not be necessary." 'Vadum cut it sternly. Katerina felt like rolling her eyes. Those two never got along.

"Chief!"

All eyes were on the storage device. It was Cortana! "Success!" Guilty Spark cheered.

So this was the Spartan's A.I. companion. Cortana sounded very worried, almost frightened. "High Charity, the Prophets' Holy City, is on its way to Earth. With an army of Flood. I can't tell you everything. It's not safe. The Gravemind... it knows I'm in the s-system--"

Cortana then flickered and stalled, frozen in place. Katerina took notice of the disappointment in John's voice when he said, "It's just a message,"

"Let it play," Katerina told Spark. John was surely not going to object to that.

Spark then jolted the device to life with another beam and Cortana's message resumed. "But it doesn't know about the Portal. Where it leads. On the other side, there's a solution. A way to stop the Flood. Without firing the remaining Halo rings- AH!"

Suddenly, Cortana clutched her head in pain as she collapsed to the "floor". She continued to whimper as she struggled to push herself off the floor. "Hurry, Chief... The Ark..." She glanced up, somehow perfectly looking at him. "There isn't much timeâ€|" And she froze once again. The recording had ended.

"I'm... sorry." That was the first thing anybody said after a short moment of silence and it was said by Spark.

'Vadum shook his head slightly. "No matter, Oracle. We've heard enoughâ€|" He raised his head to address the entire bridge. "Our fight is through the Portal! With the Brutes and the bastard Truth!"

Every Elite present in the room, except for Katerina, raised their forearms and roared in accord at that.

Lord Hood looked as if someone took the wind right out his sails. He gave an epic sigh and said, "Fine. We'll remain here. Hold out as long as we can."

"Did you not hear?" 'Vadum questioned. "Your world is doomedâ€|" Said in a menacing tone, he descended from his throne. "A Flood army, a Gravemind, has you in its sights. You barely survived a small contamination."

Hood was _so not _in the mood for this. "And you, Ship Master, just glassed half a continent!" He shot back. "Maybe the Flood isn't all I should be worried about..."

The Shipmaster clutched his fists, his tone not changing. "One single Flood Spore can destroy a species. Were it not for the Arbiter's counsel," He raised a hand to Katerina, who wore such an innocent look on her face. "I would have glassed your entire _planet_!"

"Rtas, please!" Katerina pleaded.

Hood was ready to bring his fist down on the table and perhaps even say a few choice words, until Miranda stepped in. "Sir, with respect, Cortana has a solution-"

"Cortana?" He snapped his neck to her. "Did you see her condition? How damaged she is? She could be corrupted for all we know. Her "solution" could be a Flood trap!"

"We should go through the Portal. Find out for sure."

"What we should do Commander, is understand - clearly - that this is humanity's final stand - here - at Earth. We go, we risk everything: every last man, woman and child! We stand our ground! we might just have a chance..."

While the two were arguing, Katerina watched as her Spartan companion leaned over the table, staring at the image of Cortana. She knew he must have been feeling terrible at this point. And the little debate going on before her was so not helping.

"No," She spoke up, grabbing John's attention as well. "If your A.I. companion is wrong, then the Flood has already won," She told him, before addressing everyone present. "But they have not. Not yet. We cannot stop now and destroy everything we have worked for for all this time. Every life lost, every sacrifice we have made would be rendered meaningless! That must not happen. Not anymore."

There was so much truth in the words of this female Elite who had been fighting by his side all this while. Never taking his eyes off her, John straightened his back and said, "I'll find Cortana's solution," He turned his head to Hood. "And I'll bring it back."

Hood was indeed a little disheartened he could not talk the Spartan out of this. "Earth... is all we have left," He reminded him. "You trust Cortana that much?"

He didn't have to ask twice. "Sir. Yes, sir."

"This is either the best decision you've ever made or the worst," Hood couldn't help but say. "Hell if it is, Chief? I doubt I'll live long enough to find out which." Dismayed, he walked out of the bridge in silence.

John, however, turned his head to Katerina and gave her an approving nod. Though she could not see it, there was a smile behind that helmet.

28. Of Trust and Friendship

****Halo ****â€œ**** Katerina Duran - "Make It Last: Of Trust and Friendship"****

* * *

><p>Location: Observation Deck, UNSC Frigate
_**Forward onto Dawn
>_**November 19th, 2552**

"You wanted to see me?"

Entering the Observation Deck of the Dawn, the Master Chief found that his Elite companion was already there, watching as the galaxy passed by her. Katerina Duran was dressed in her Arbiter armor, but with her silver scarf draped over her upper body, held in place with that brooch of hers.

When she turned to face him, she could not stop herself from taking a moment to gawk in awe. It was because the Spartan she had been running around with for these two days was out of his armor. Katerina found herself looking at a man in a plain black shirt and cargo pants, his skin unnaturally pale, ocean-blue eyes and short reddish wavy hair. "Hello, Spartan," She greeted, getting her voice back. "Yes, I required your presence." She said, gently pushing her right-sided fringe away from her eye.

John took his time to walk up to her. "Well, I'm here now. What do you need?"

Her fingers were entwined with each other. "I just thought that now would be the best time for me to give you that explanation you wanted. In fact, the Sergeant told me that you disliked being kept in the dark."

"That I do,"

"So I apologize that I could not tell you what needed to be said. But since we are hereâ€œ|" She gave an epic sigh. "Go ahead. You may ask whatever you like and I will answer truthfully. Anything that will help you understand where I have always stood in this war since the beginning."

"Let's start right there," John folded his arms across his chest. "You said that you and your sons were forced into the Covenant. I don't think I've heard of such a thing."

"Well, I would not say 'forced'â€œ| I justâ€œ|" Katerina halted her eye contact instantly. "â€œ|did not have a choice. I had to protect what was left of my home. Truth, heâ€œ|" Suddenly, she felt like she could not continue. She felt like she did not want to continue. "I-I cannot do this. Perhaps another time."

With that, she attempted to walk right past him. "Hold it," He grabbed her upper right arm in an instant and gently pulled her back so he could look at her. "Talk to me, Katerina. Give me all the reasons to fully trust you." Right then and there, he found that

wistful look in her cat-like violet eyes that he had seen over these two days. "What did Truth do what was so bad?"

Katerina blinked her eyes rapidly at that question. "It really pains me to have to say. He stole _everything _from me. My home, my dreams, my familyâ€¦ He barely left anything behind, him and the other Prophets," That had reminded her of something. "Which reminds me: you are my hero for murdering Regret. I hope that piece of garbage suffered greatly."

_You're welcome? _"But why would the Covenant have it out for you?"

"Because I said the magic words: 'The Great Journey is a lie'." Following a small sigh, she said, "It is aâ€¦ rather long and difficult story, Spartan and I do not think you would be-"

"Tell me," Those two words silenced her. "Tell me everything."

"Iâ€¦ do not understandâ€¦"

Then John would have to make her understand why doing something he had never thought he'd do â€" reach out to an Elite. "Look, you're a great soldier. Really, you've got talent out on that field. But I've always, _always _seen this wistful look in your eyes. Something's obviously bothering you. And I don't want that to cloud your mind while you're on the field because I _don't_ want your blood on my hands."

Her forehead ceased with confusion and sadness at the same time. She gazed at him with her eyes, trying her hardest to understand.

"You don't know me and I don't know you. But onboard the _Pillar of Autumn_, you saved my life. You said you'd pulled Covenant forces from the cyrochambers and you did. Johnson told me you tried to save him and Miranda at the Library too. _And _you supported me when I said I wanted to find Cortana's solution to the Flood," A little smile came to him right then. "You helped me soâ€¦ let me help you, okay? What happened?"

She had her own smile right then. "You are most kind, Spartan. Truly. If you wish to help me with my problems thenâ€¦"

He crossed his arms over his chest again. "Maybe I can't solve them, but you obviouslyâ€¦ need a friend. Since it's just the two of us here, what have you got to lose?"

"Perhaps you are right," She said with a little giggle. "I will trust you then."

* * *

><p>AN: Thumbs up for OOC Chief? **

**This short little chapter is to make way for Katerina's past! :)
**

Halo **â€œ**** Katerina Duran - "Make It Last: Of Trust and Friendship"**

* * *

><p>Location: Duran Keep, State of Duran, Sanghelios
July 3rd, 2502**

"Oh my. Such beauty."

17-year-old Katerina Velam's jaw dropped slightly at that, but a smile soon crossed her face. "Oh. Thank you!"

"Welcome to the Duran Keep, Katerina. I hope you had a safe travel," The young, apple-green eyed Elite said.

"That I did, Kaidon."

"Please, my dear," Came an amused reply. "Micah would be just fine."

"Oh," Her violet eyes widened once again. "Um, are you certain? I do not wish to be rude-

"Not at all, my dear," Micah cut in politely. "In fact, I insist."

Her smile returned to its place. "If you say so, Micah. I would like to thank for you letting me into the State of Duran."

"Your reasons for leaving your Keep were quite clear in your message, Katerina. There was no way we would turn you away," The pale blue-skinned Elite closed the gap between them. "You will find that the State of Duran is perfectly capable of surviving without the Covenant. We have been for centuries."

"Yes, I have read and heard the stories. I knew that this would be the perfect home for me. I cannot stay at the Velam Keep anymore. All the talk about the Covenant and the Forerunnersâ€| the last straw was finding out that my father was not who he was supposed to be."

His eyes softened at that. "Ah yes. Children being raised by their maternal uncles."

"Yes, Kaido- Micah. After arguing with my mother, she told me that my real father had left for the State of Duran, hurt that he could never have the relationship he had desired with me or my brothers. It was then I began to enquire about this State."

"And perhaps it was best you left," She felt a smile from the Kaidon. "I will personally escort you to your chambers, Katerina; you will be residing here, in the Duran Keep."

"I- Well, if you insist,"

"I do, my dear. Come. Let me see you to your chambers. Your new life begins here, in the State of Duran."

* * *

><p>Location: Observation Deck, UNSC Frigate
_**Forward onto Dawn
>_**November 19th, 2552**

"As the Covenant was formed, a group of Sangheili opposed to the formation and instead tore away from the rest of the race to become the State of Duran. Those who despised the Covenant were welcome to stay. Some Keeps did not practice certain Sangheili customs, some did not believe in the Forerunnersâ€¦ Whatever it was, the entire State was formed because we did not choose to bow down to others."

"This was not going to sit well with the Covenant leaders though,"

"No it did not," Katerina said with a faked smile. "For years, the Covenant and its leaders attempted to reach out to our State, but we remained resilient. I justâ€¦ never thought it would go to the extent ofâ€¦"

John reached forward to squeeze her shoulder. "It's okay. Why don't you tell me more about your husband?"

"Micah was a blessing," She told him almost immediately. "I admit I was smitten by him, but when he brought me to my real father, I realized just how wonderful he truly was. Every moment spent with him, I cherished it. It was not long before he asked me to marry him." Her voice was tainted with sadness throughout the whole thing. "It was supposed to have lasted forever, you know? Him, I, our 7 children-"

"7?!" The Spartan jerked his head back, awed. "You have 7 children?!"

Katerina was slightly puzzled by his reaction, but also a little amused. "Yes, I do. Why are you shocked, Spartan? Is it not common?"

"Notâ€¦ to me it is,"

"How many children do you have, then?" She questioned after giggling at his reaction.

"Oh, umâ€¦" He cleared his throat and answered with, "I don't have any."

"Oh, I see," She nodded her head, acknowledging it.

"So you all were one big happy family, then,"

"Oh yes, we were! Joy and laughter filled the house every day!" Her wide smile suppressed to a smaller one. "I really wished it could have lasted longer thoughâ€¦"

"Katerina," He caught her violet orbs. "You need to tell me what happened."

"It isâ€¦ still so difficultâ€¦"

"You can cry your heart out if you want to. You obviously need it. Don't worry â€" I'm here."

Sincerity was written all over him and she saw that clearly. She trusted him, but she did not if she could trust him with her story. She did not even talk to Darius or Versera about that horrifying day for it was her burden to bear. But now, this human sitting opposite her, this Spartan, wanted to help her. Wanted to understand her. Solace was what she needed, and he was going to give it to her.

* * *

><p>AN: Thumbs up or seriously OOC Chief and me not updating for centuries?
>

30. Duran's Lullaby

Halo **â€"**** Katerina Duran - "Make It Last: Of Trust and Friendship"**

* * *

><p>Location: Private Chambers, Duran Keep, State of Duran, Sanghelios
February 10****th****, 2504**

"_There could be dark skies and the fiercest of storms. But there is nothing that will tear me away from you. I will fight until my very last breath and bring you home." _Following that, Katerina Duran giggled amiably at the newborn in her arms. "Did you like that, darling? That was just for you."

"And it was beautiful, Kate."

"Oh! Micah!" She turned her head enough for her to spot her husband standing at the doorway, his arms folded across his chest. "Join us, love, won't you?"

"But of course," With a spring in his step, Micah sat right next to his wife and newborn son, holding her close while she held their son close to her. "How is he doing?"

"He has been asleep all this time. It was so adorable to look at, honestly."

"And how about you?"

Heaving a little sigh, she told him, "I am a little tired admittedly, but it is fine. I want to hold him a little longer and sing him his song,"

"Yes, about that â€" I do not think I've heard you sing that before,"

Her reply came with a wide and blissful smile. "Oh that? It was something I have been working on while awaiting for his arrival. I know it is silly but I believe that he finds it soothing to listen to."

"Well, _I _think it is not silly, Kate. Like I said, it was beautiful. The perfect lullaby for him." So saying, he touched

foreheads with her.

Her giggles were uncontrollable at this point. "Darling, we still have not decided on a name for him." She expressed sadly as she handed the newborn over to her husband.

"Have no fear, Kate," Micah kept his gaze on his newborn son. "I think I have the perfect name for him?"

"Oh? Do tell."

"Darius."

Her smile disappeared like smoke.

When he caught that, she felt him smile cheekily. "Why not? I think it is a strong name for a firstborn."

"You are naming him after my father?"

He decided to explain himself. "Since the day he arrived at the Duran Keep, he has been one of the most respected elders here. He is humble, modest. Kate, my love, you resemble him in every way; I was not surprised when you named him as your father. I feel that it is only right. And also, would it not warm his heart to know that his first grandchild is named after him?"

She could not prevent tears from surfacing in her violet eyes. "He will be overjoyed when we tell him. You are so wonderful for even considering this, Micah. How many more times can I say that I love you?"

"Tell me as many times as you possibly can, Kate. Never will I ever get tired of hearing it in your sweet voice."

She countered her tears by touching foreheads with him once again. After that, she sung her little lullaby for their ears to listen.

* * *

><p>AN: Here's another tiny chapter to make up for not updating for so long. D:
>

**Also, Kate's little lullaby actually has a tone to it and everything. It was something I had been tweaking with just for kicks.
x) **

31. The Gift

Halo **â€"**** Katerina Duran - "Make It Last: Of Trust and Friendship" **

* * *

><p>Location: Observation Deck, UNSC Frigate Forward onto Dawn
November 19th, 2552**

"That lullabyâ€" Katerina immediately dumped her in her hands. "That

lullaby of mine was meant to be a song for my children. It was meant to be something comforting. But now, _every time _I get a quiet moment to myself, it runs through my head and only gives me horrorsâ€|"

"Come on, Katerina," John reached forward with both hands and placed them on her upper arms. "That shouldn't be the case."

"It would be," She removed her hands from her face and look up to his face. "If your husband's last request was for you to sing it to him as he bled to death."

He gaped slightly at that and his grip on her upper arms loosened instantly. He was thinking of what to say to her at this point, but nothing was coming to him. Without much thought, he said, "Tell me about your children. What they are like. I've already met your eldest. Are the rest of them like him too?"

He was attempting to make this as painless as possible for the female Elite. She was seeing that, and she appreciated his generosity for even listening to her in the first place. For trying to help her. "Oh goodness, no. After Darius, was Lessa, the first daughter. She was a tough one. She and Darius were never apart; always training like there was no tomorrow. Then came the twins, Rho and Rernak. Never one without the other. After them was Melika. She isâ€| a rather rebellious child. After her wasâ€| Versera. He was named after Micah's father. Rather quiet child but highly deadly in combat, let me assure you. And lastly is little Ana, the innocent one of the bunch," A small smile came to the Elite. "Versera doted on Ana too; they absolutely loved to do everything together."

John noticed that she was struggling to keep her smile. "What's wrong, Katerina?"

"Anaâ€| She was just 4 years old when she witnessed all the horror. Darius was 20, Melika was 11, and Versera was 7."

Something was not right there. "Katerina? Why did you only name 4 of your childrenâ€|?"

Tears glistened in the Arbiter's eyes as she tore away from the Spartan's gaze and drew imaginary circles on the table next to them. The words were trapped in her windpipe. Realization hit John, and his heart ached at that.

She gave him a teary, heartbroken smile. "I hope that further explains why my lullaby haunts me."

John swallowed that lump in his throat before asking, "Why don't you tell me more about your kids? Raising 7 children must have been no easy thing."

"Goodness, no, it wasn't!" She flashed a genuine smile. "But I always had Micah, his sister and my father with me. It made things easier. The funny thing was, I thought the twins were my last. Then came Melika, then Versera and then Ana."

* * *

><p>Location: Private Chambers, Duran Keep, State of Duran,

Sanghelios
December 25****th****, 2518**

"UGH. This is getting highly annoying! Why can't the Prophets just leave us be?! Their attempts at 'converting' us will _never _work! We will _never _bow down to them!"

"Be calm, my dear. It is not like we have not dealt with them before. We will go to High Charity, inform them that we decline their invitation, and leave. As always."

"Micah. I am _sick _of thisâ€|" Katerina growled softly, her violet eyes blazing with fire.

"Kate, you must calm down," Micah placed his hands on his wife's shoulders and squeezed gently. "You acting this way is only going to make things difficult. Remember â€" this is the Covenant. They have a much _larger _army than us. I am sure the last thing you would want is for anything to happen to this State!"

She pouted at that and glanced down at her twiddling fingers. "I am just sick of this treatment, that is all. I just want them to leave us alone so we can be at peace. You, me, our 7 childrenâ€| We should not have to be worried about this but we have been all this time. When will it stop?"

She was looking for an answer of some kind from her husband, but all she got was a puzzled look plastered on his face. "Kate? We only have 6 childrenâ€|"

She furrowed her eyebrows, and then grasped her folly. "OOOOH, I spoilt the surprise, did I not?" She drew her breath in a hiss before declaring with much joy, "Surprise!"

Micah brought his hands up to his jaw. "Kate, are you serious?!"

She tilted her head at him and wore a smirk on his lips. "I often told you how I thought the twins would be our last. Then came Melika and I told you the same thing. Then came Versera and I told you the same thing. Do you _not _see a pattern here, Micah?"

"You need to stop giving me so many gifts." With that, he lifted his wife off the ground effortlessly and embraced her.

32. Prepared

Halo **â€"**** Katerina Duran - "Make It Last: Of Trust and Friendship"**

* * *

><p>"With all due respect, no matter what you all say, no matter the amount of gifts you bestow upon us, the State of Duran of Sanghelios will remain as we are. We have our own beliefs, and we do not wish to change that. We do not wish to join the Covenant Empire, not now, not ever, regardless of what the rest of our homeworld does!"

"_When the Great Journey begins, Katerina, you and your State will be left behind."_

"_The Great Journey IS A LIE! Now I've had enough. This ends here right now." _

* * *

><p>Location: Private Chambers, Duran Keep, State of Duran, Sanghelios
November 14****th****, 2523**

"Are you alright?"

A heavy sigh was the only reply Micah Duran received. He sat beside his wife on the bed, one arm wrapped around her as her head continued to hang low. "Say something to me, darling."

"What have I done, Micah? I said the absolute worst thing to say to the Covenantâ€|" Her head snapped up and she looked at him straight in the eyes with panic. "What if they were to do something drastic? What if they were to attack us for this? Micah, we _cannot _let that happen-"

"Kate, darling," He held a hand up to stop her. "Calm yourself. It will be alright."

"How?" She narrowed her eyes at him. "You said so yourself that they have a much larger army than us! I've just doomed us all!"

"Kate, please," He quickly cupped her cheeks. "You have not. We will simply strengthen our defenses."

He watched as her forehead creased with confusion. "I do not understand. Why are you not angry with me?"

He gently pushed her fringe away from her eyes. "Somebody needed to put them in their place, which you did. They deserved what was coming to them."

The look of uncertainty was still on her face. She turned her head forward, unable to say anything more.

With one hand, Micah cupped her cheeks and turned her head to him once again. "Listen to me: it will be alright. It was only a matter of time before one of us had to tell them off. We are going to be fine, let me assure you. We are prepared for any kind of attack."

The fear flashed across her violet eyes. "But are we prepared for the Covenant?"

* * *

><p>AN: A short chapter to make way for the (possibly) longest chapter in this story and a conclusion to Kate's past!
**

33. Intrusion

Halo **â€"**** Katerina Duran - "Make It Last: Of Trust and Friendship"**

* * *

><p>Location: Duran Keep, State of Duran,
Sanghelios
November 18****th****, 2523**

Katerina Duran stood at the doorway of the back door of her home, watching with much wistfulness as her twin boys, Rho and Rernak, as well as Versera run around their backyard, playing tag. Melika was sitting comfortably under a tree with her _arum_ in hand, trying to avoid contact with anyone else. Darius and Lessa, her two eldest were at the far end of the backyard, training. As usual. Those two could not find anything else to do in their spare time.

With her arms folded across her chest, she exhaled heavily, still upset over what had transpired at High Charity a couple of days ago. She had been living in fear thus far and the feeling of uncertainty still would not go away. She was unable to sleep properly at night over this and it was driving her mad.

So she tried to find some happiness in watching her children laugh and play and have fun. She and Micah did not tell any of their 7 children what had went down. They did not want them to worry. They did not want to ruin their peace.

"Mother?"

A sweet and innocent-sounding voice caught Katerina's attention. She turned to her left and glanced down into the eyes of her youngest child, Ana. Getting on her knees, she flashed a tired smile at her. "Hello, Ana. What can I do for my youngest darling?"

"Nothing, really," The black-haired 4-year-old had her hands behind her back. "I wanted to ask why you were looking so sad."

"Ohâ€| it is nothing, Ana. I am simplyâ€| missing your father. He has gone to the Aren Keep after all."

"Oh," Understanding completely, Ana then wrapped her little arms around her mother's neck and gave her a hug.

"What was that for, my dear?" She questioned once her daughter pulled back.

She was met with a large smile from Ana. "Just to make you feel better. Is that not what a hug is supposed to do?"

Such innocence. How could Katerina not grin at that? "It most certainly did! Thank you very much, Ana! Why don't you go join you brothers in their little game?"

"Alright!"

She watched as her youngest skipped off to her brothers. By then, Melika had already made her way to Katerina, wearing an irritated look on her face. "Melika. Heading inside already?"

Titling her head at her mother, she lifted the _arum_ high up. "If I spend one more moment with this hideous thing, I think I will lose my mind, mother."

"Darling, the _arum _is designed to teach patience,"

"More like lose it. I am done." She dumped the object into her mother's hands and walked into the house, huffing.

One day, someday, Katerina will earn try to earn some respect from that child of hers. Until then, Melika preferred to be alone and angry with the world for some odd reason. Whatever the reason was, Katerina was convinced that it was somehow her fault.

By then, Darius and Lessa stood before their mother, smirking and drenched in sweat from her training session.

Katerina returned the smirk. "What are the two of you smirking at?"

"Trying to figure out what you did that caused Melika to act like that towards you," Lessa answered, as bold as she always did, one hand resting on her custom-made blade attaching to the side of her hip. The blade was similar in size to a chef's knife, with its blade being a clip-point. Micah, Katerina, Darius, Lessa, Rho and Rernak had one.

"I was wondering if you could tell me that."

Darius shrugged his shoulders. "Your guess is as good as ours. She just appears to hate the world."

"Perhaps she desires for something more," Lessa added.

"What, you mean like more than our Keep?" Katerina asked, arms across her chest.

"Well, she _is _a rather adventurous child. We _did _tell her of our State's history and why we rarely leave this Keep. Perhaps she just wants to get out more."

"We cannot allow that," Darius said. "Have the other Sangheili spit lies and corrupt her mind?"

"That is the last thing we wantâ€¦" Lessa admitted, turning her head back to her mother. "She's just a child, mother. She will understand soon enough. Until then, do not be upset over this like you have been for the past few days."

Katerina's eyes were glued to the ground as a faked laugh came to her. "Thatâ€¦ is not the reason for my sadness, Lessa."

Darius was overly-protective of his mother, so naturally, he was the first one to say, "Then what troubles you, mother? Please, tell us."

"Yes please, mother. We are here for you."

* * *

><p>Location: Dining Hall

"Mother. It has been days since your visit to High Charity. Nothing

has happened. Why are you still paranoid?" Darius asked, leaning against the chair.

"_Of course _I am paranoid, Dar! _I _was the one who said those things!" Katerina's eyes widened in trepidation. "I have the two of you and your five siblings to worry about! Are you saying I do not have the right to worry?"

"All I am saying is that nothing has happened so far."

"â€| What if that is what they want us to believe?"

"Mother-"

Lessa was then cut off by what sounded like an explosion from far away, but it was enough to mildly shake their house. A heartbeat later, a second explosion followed. The three of them exchanged puzzled expressions before deciding to get up and head outside to see what exactly was going on.

Exiting the front door, they saw that several of her Keep's houses were on fire and its residents were running out screaming for help. At a distance, objects that looked likeâ€| pods were falling from the sky. Glancing up, the skies were decorated with these purple-colored, strange-looking ships, one or two even emerging from _cloaking. _

It was undeniable who these intruders were.

"What in the-"

"It's the Covenant!" Katerina managed to say, her stomach in knots and her emotions running sky-high. "Get your siblings inside, now!"

A few drop pods landed at a short distance from their doorstep. With large eyes, Katerina saw those pods' doors kick open to reveal the beasts known as Brutes.

"Get inside!" She practically pushed her two eldest inside and shut the front door. "Go get your siblings! Hurry!"

Before anything could be done, her five remaining children hurried inside. "Mother! What is going on?!" Rho questioned.

Ana ran into her mother's arms instinctively. "We are being attacked. By the Covenant."

"WHAT?!" Melika exclaimed in a shriek.

"We are in grave danger! Listen to me: I need you all to head into the basement and _stay there_. Do you understand me? Do NOT leave it for whatever reason! Rho, Rernak, look after your brother and sisters. Darius, Lessa and I will handle things up here!"

The front door was met with violet raps.

She turned her head to her two eldest children. "Take care of whatever comes through that door! I will take your siblings downstairs! Come on!"

The five children followed closely behind their mother as she ran to the basement, careful not to trip over her dress. She opened the doors to the basement and motioned for the five of them to enter in. She was about to close the doors on them when-

"No! Mother, please do not go!" Ana clung onto her mother's leg.

"Oh darling," Katerina got to her knees and looked at her youngest child straight in the eyes. "I am not going anywhere! I swear! But your brother and sister need my assistance upstairs. Do not worry a thing; everything will be alright."

" 'Everything will be alright'? Are you blind, mother? We are being attacked!_" Melika almost screamed.

"Melika, we do not need that right now!" Versera stepped up, placing his hands on Ana's shoulders. "Come, Ana. Mother will take care of this. You need not worry."

"That's right, my dear. Nothing is taking me away from you or your siblings." Katerina said with much assurance, hoping the most innocent one of the bunch will get it.

Ana could only feel assured with a tight hug from her mother so she got one. Pulling away Katerina got to her feet and locked eyes with her twins. "I know this will be difficult for you two, but you must: kill anything that even glances at your siblings."

She received a nod in return.

Shutting the basement doors behind her, she shifted a nearby drawer and placed it in front of the doors. Right then, she heard the front door of her house breaking open.

They were getting inside.

There was no time to waste. That door was not going to hold forever and her two eldest children needed some help. It was time to join them and reclaim their house, their Keep and their State.

* * *

><p>AN: Wrote more than I wanted to for what was supposed to be a short intro, so I decided to post it first. x)

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34. Master of Disaster

****Halo ****â€"**** Katerina Duran - "Make It Last: Of Trust and Friendship"****

* * *

><p>"The whole event was like a vicious nightmare. I keep wanting to wake up but I could not because it was real. All of it. All of this had happened before my eyes. I had countless sleepless nights after, for the fear that I would relive the event in my dreams."

—

****Location: Duran Keep, State of Duran, Sanghelios
>November 18**th****, 2523****

"GET OUT OF OUR HOUSE!"

That was Lessa's fearless cry as she drove her dagger into the neck of one of the four Gravity Hammer-wielding Brutes, three Minors and one Ultra. Their front door had been rudely broken down by these creatures of the Covenant, and they were now invading their home. Katerina, Darius and Lessa were going to do whatever it took to keep them and any other Covenant forces from proceeding further.

Waves of panic were running through Katerina but she tried her best to keep her composure. She took a jump backwards to avoid the wrath of a Gravity Hammer (somehow managing to not trip on her dress). She lunged forward, her dagger in hand and aimed for the Brute's neck. Darius and Lessa quickly took care of the two remaining Brutes effectively.

A Brute Major then appeared at the doorway without any warning, a mere second after the last Brute was killed. Katerina spun around once she heard the growls the Brute gave and found that a Spike was pointed in her direction. "Mother!" In an instant, Lessa shoved her out of the way just as the spikes were fired.

Lessa caught them.

"Lessa!" Darius twirled his dagger in his neck and flung it at the Brute, getting him front in between the eyes. Ouch.

Pushing herself off the ground, Katerina turned her headâ€| only to find her eldest daughter on the ground, two spikes protruding from her chest and one more from her abdomen.

Time felt like it had stopped for Katerina. She crawled over to her second child. "Lessa!" One of her hands was placed behind Lessa's head, holding it a little higher and her other hand was entwined with Lessa's. "Lessa, darling, I need you to stay strong. Do you understand me?! Stay strong! Just keep breathing!"

Lessa's apple-green eyes were wide open and fixed onto her mother. She found it difficult to say anything. All she could manage were gasps.

Just then, another Brute Major came charging in with a Gravity Hammer, failing to keep its secrecy by releasing a loud roar as it entered. Darius, having picked up the Spiker, fired a few shots into the Brute, stopping it in its tracks. When Katerina shifted her attention back to her fallen daughter, she was only met with Lessa's unmoving eyes and still body. "Lessa?" The grip Lessa's originally had on her mother's hand was but a soft one now. "Oh noâ€| no, no! Lessa! Lessa, please, do not do this! Do not- Please, Lessa, say something! _Anything_!"

Darius cursed in Sangheili, kicking the body of a fallen Brute at the same time. It was then that he caught sight of more drop podsâ€| this time, in their backyard. "Motherâ€| mother, we need to get moving!"

Katerina was in tears, gently caressing Lessa's perfectly chiseled cheekbones and deaf to Darius' calls.

"Mother! They are in our _backyard_! Get up, _please_!" He shook her by her shoulders.

Snapping out of her trance, she realized the oncoming forces in the backyard. Taking one last look at Lessa, she emerged to her feet, her own dagger and Lessa's dagger in hand.

"4 Brutes, 2 with hammers and 2 with Spikers." Darius informed, glancing out of the window.

Without a word and any warning whatsoever, Katerina walked out of their house and into the backyard, the two daggers in hand. The moment she was in their sights, the Brute Minors with Spikers sprayed spikes in her direction. She immediately moved in zigzags, avoiding any of the shots, and then when it was the perfect moment, threw one dagger at a Spiker-wielding Brute. Darius fired whatever shots left in the Spiker he was carrying at the other Brute wielding the Spiker to cover his mother.

All that was left were the other two with Gravity Hammers. Katerina practically leaped and jumped one the first one, catching him by surprise and then stabbing the defenseless creature in the face repeatedly. Darius took care of the remaining Brute with his own dagger.

Even after the Brute beneath Katerina was dead, she did not stop her stabbings. Until her sharp ears picked up screaming.

The basement!

Katerina glanced back at the house with a gasp. "The others!"

"Go after them!" Darius told her. "I will guard the house!"

Katerina wasted no time. She ran like hell back inside the house and to the basement. Her stomach almost dropped when she saw that the doors were pulled completely off its hinges. Inside, there were the bodies of three of the creatures known as Jackals, one Brute Ultra and her twin boys.

She started to screech hysterically, about ready to pull her beautiful black hair out of its roots. "NO!" She was about to get to their bodies when-

"Mother!"

Katerina could recognize Ana's little voice anywhere. Spinning around, Ana immediately jumped into her mother's safe arms and hugged her tightly. Melika and Versera hurried over and embraced their mother as well. "Darlings! You are all safe!"

"Rho and Rernak told us to hide under the stairs once the doors were open, and then run the moment the enemies were distracted." Ana said, in between sobs.

Realization came over the female Elite. Her twin boys had sacrificed themselves for their younger siblings. She shut her eyes tightly at

that, hugging her children even closer. "Listen to me: I need you all to run to my chambers and stay there. I am going to get Darius to guard it."

"W-what are you going to do?" Versera questioned in a trembling tone.

"I need to find your father."

* * *

><p>Once Katerina locked them in her private chambers, she rushed to the backyard and Darius was nowhere to be found. "Dar!" She called out desperately for him. "Dar, where are you?!" The tears would not stop running down her cheeks. She had just lost her eldest daughter, now her twin boys, and now her firstborn was missing. Where was Darius? Where could he have-

Katerina's thoughts were interrupted the moment one of those things called a Hunter created a massive hole in her fence. Her eyes widened as much as possible as she stood rooted to the ground.

The Hunter cocked its head at her and then making some inaudible groans at her that she did not understand.

But when it raised its fuel rod cannon at her, she understood that perfectly.

The cannon fired up. With a gasped, she rolled out of the way as it fired one shot. With the one dagger in hand, she made a run for the Hunter. She noticed the exposed neck and torso of the Hunter. _Those _were the places she needed to aim. If she could avoid the huge shield it had in its other arm!

It attempted to bring down its shield on Katerina but she took a step to the right. A second attempt using the weight of its cannon instead, also failed. She needed to get to either its neck or torso. But the damned thing was too tall for her and she was wearing a freaking dress!

She had no choice. The moment its shield hit the ground, she got on top of it. She was way too close for the Hunter to use its cannon on her. She was about to leap for its upper arm when it raised its shield effortlessly, with enough power to throw Katerina completely off. She landed flat on her back, behind the Hunter.

With a pained grunt, she rolled onto her stomach. The Hunter made a 180-degree turn to face her. And she felt like she was facing death itself.

She needed to get to her feet and fast!

Suddenly, the Hunter let go of what sounded like pained moans as it arched its back. She watched as it fell to its knees, and then onto its face.

She caught sight of the spikes from a Brute Spiker in the back of its exploded torso€| as well as Micah wielding a Spiker and a Plasma Rifle in hand.

"Micah!" She called out in utter happiness and relief, putting everything into getting back onto her feet.

Micah tossed both of his weapons asides and ran to his wife, letting her fall into his arms. "Kate! My love, are you hurt?"

She ignored the throbbing pain in her lower back. "I am fine," She said into his chest. "Butâ€¦ but Lessaâ€¦"

"I knowâ€¦ I knowâ€¦" When she pulled back, she found tears glistening in his apple-green eyes. He had come across their eldest daughter's body.

Did he know about their twins? "But Micahâ€¦ the twinsâ€¦"

She got her answer when her husband widened his eyes and whispered, "Noâ€¦"

"They were protecting the young ones..."

"Where are they, then?"

"I took them up to our chambers and locked the doors. I wanted to get Darius to go up there, but I cannot find him!" She said frantically.

He placed his hands on her shoulders. "Alright, do not panic. Perhaps he's gone to the-"

Micah did not even get to finish his sentence. A sudden shockwave surrounded the two Elites and they lost control of their own bodies. Katerina fell to her knees, as did Micah. It was then that she realized that they were not alone in this backyard â€" a lone Brute and the second Hunter had joined them.

The Brute grabbed Micah by the nape of his neck and began to drag him forcefully away from his wife. The second Hunter brought its shield down in front of Katerina, barely missing her legs. "Micahâ€¦!" She was feeling the effects of that shockwave that had struck them, but she got a good look at this Brute â€" he had pale grey skin and silver fur, and he was carrying a Gravity Hammer, but his hammer looked slightly different than the normal weapon she had seen so far.

She saw that the Brute had it in his left hand and Micah's neck was in his other. Tossing Micah to the side, the Brute wielded his hammer like a golf club and swung it at the defenseless, still-paralyzed Elite.

Katerina felt that blow hit her right in the heart as well. "Micah, no!" She flopped onto the Hunter's shield. "What are you doing?! STOP it!" She screamed at the top of her lungs as the assault continued. She attempted to get to her feet but was still rather shaky from that shockwave. _Where _did it even come from?

The Hunter shoved its shield into Katerina very lightly, but enough to take her off her feet once again. She needed to stop this beat down on her husband. She was _not _going to lose him too!

Her tired eyes searched for her dagger, after losing possession of it

when the first Hunter threw her off. She found it behind this Hunter. With whatever energy she had, despite the effects of the shockwave, she ran in between the Hunter's legs and threw herself onto the ground and grabbed it. The Hunter spun around as quickly as possible and brought its shield down, with Katerina instinctively rolling out of the way.

"No, you fool! Do not kill her!" She heard the Brute say clearly. His voice felt like pure evil, so deep and unpleasant.

With the Hunter distracted, Katerina took this perfect opportunity to run past the Hunter again, and this time, jump onto the back of its right leg. As the creature was wildly disorientated, as if she was rock-climbing, she began to make her way up the leg and close to its exposed torso. With everything she had, she drove her dagger into it, eliciting a loud pained groan from the Hunter. But she did not stop there " she kept on stabbing until this thing would fall to its knees.

When the Hunter finally did, her arm was almost covered in orange blood. Catching her breath, she glanced up to find Micah on his hands and knees, seemingly beaten to a pulp and that Brute standing over him. He did not look the least bit impressed by what Katerina had done to the Hunter. He was just satisfied with his work of Micah, and took off in a jog via one of the few holes in the fence.

"Get BACK here!" She shouted, attempting to give chase. She stopped in her tracks the moment she heard her name in a mumble.

"Micah!" Micah's hand was reaching out to her. With new tears in her eyes, she rushed to his side, taking him into her arms. With his head resting on her chest, she examined what had been done to her husband. Cuts and bruises everywhere, the blood trailing from his head " _what _had that Brute done?

"Micah, darling, you listen to me right now. You fight this, do you understand me? Do _not _leave me!" She said in a shaky tone. "I-I am going to get help! Stay strong, alright? I will go get help!"

His apple-green eyes were half-open and he kept them on his wife. "It " it is quite alright, Kate " It is alright "There is nothing you can for me. It is over."

"No " That came out in a whimper. "No, it is not! We've lost Lessa, the twins! I do not know where Darius is! You cannot leave too! _Please_, my love " Were her attempts at begging only in vain? "Do you remember what you told me the State of Duran stood for? Other than never bowing to others, this State believing in making everything last. And you told me, the day you proposed to me, you told me that we were going to make _this _last. This marriage, all of our moments together, we were going to make it _all _last! Please do not forsake me now, Micah " "

"I am so sorry, my love " I promised you so much, did I not "?" A bloodied hand clasped hers.

"You did " "

He had no reply to that. He only had these last few minutes with her. "Kate, my love " may I request two things of you?"

"Anything! Anything you desire!"

"Whatever happens from here on outâ€¦ do whatever it takes to ensure the safety of our children, your fatherâ€¦ this keep, this State. Please, whatever it takes."

She nodded frantically, not realizing how tightly she was clasping her husband's hands. "And the other, Micah?"

She felt him smile. "Will you sing me your lullaby, please?"

"M-my lullaby?"

"Yes, Kate. I want that to be the last thing I hear, pleaseâ€¦"

The tears were streaming down her perfectly-chiseled cheeks, but she did it. Time felt like it had slowed down terribly, and that she and Micah were the only ones left now. With their hands entwined, she began her lullaby.

"_There could be dark skies and the fiercest of storms. _

_But there is nothing that will tear me away from you. _

_I will fight until my very last breath and bring you homeâ€¦|"

—

Glancing down at her husband, she found that he had closed his eyes now. And Katerina began to cry harder than she had ever cried before.

* * *

><p>AN: Well, I hope you guys liked this chapter as it closes the story of Kate's past! **

35. Elastic Heart

Halo **â€œ***** Katerina Duran - "Make It Last: Of Trust and Friendship" **

* * *

><p>Location: Observation Deck, UNSC Frigate
_**Forward onto Dawn
>_**November 19th, 2552**

"The next thing I knewâ€¦ I was kneeling before the Prophets, begging for mercy. They said if I wanted the State to be left alone, we would have to give in and join the Covenant. I was not going to let Darius and Versera go alone so I offered my services as well."

The Spartan sitting in front of her had the widest of eyes and kept silent even after the Elite had stopped talking. John had just heard Katerina's story, described in full detail and he would be lying to himself he said that he was not torn by her story.

"Andâ€¦ that is it. That is what I have been keeping to myself all

this while, for all of these years. The reasons why I have this hatred towards the Prophets." She said softly as she wiped away the last streaming tears.

"You are easily the strongest person I've ever met," That was the first thing he managed to say. "29 years, Katerina. How do you do it?"

She glanced down at her hands. "You yourself must have lost a lot of people, Spartan. Must you not find some way to move on? While I admit that there were times whereâ€¦ I had simply wanted to put my dagger to my neck, I realized that it would be far better to put it to Truth's neck," She then forced a laugh. "Orâ€¦ perhaps I have got an elastic heart."

"Perhapsâ€¦" He leaned back against the chair. "Don't you a thing. I'll make sure you get Truth alive. I won't hold you back."

"That is sweet of you. Although I think I may lose control when I do get my hands on him."

"I'll look out for you," John didn't even think when he said those words. They just slipped out of his mouth and he did not have any intentions on taking the back. "Right now, I think you should get some rest. Be with your son," He held out his hand to her and with a little hesitation, she gave him hers. "We can talk more tomorrow." He pulled her up to her feet.

_More? Tomorrow? _"Does this mean I have your trust? That you believe me?"

John then gave her a warm smile, one that she found comforting. "When you confronted that Brute in the Control Room, you were with Johnson. He heard everything you had to say to the Brute and everything the Brute had to say to youâ€¦ before you smashed his head in with his own hammer," He added with the slightest hint of humor in his tone. "If that Brute really said all those things and Johnson isn't lying to me, then there's no way that you're lying. So yes, Katerina, I believe you. And trust you."

Such a wide and grateful grin appeared on her face. "Thank you! Now I am _truly _thankful to have the Sergeant as a companion. He had so much _flare _during battle, it is so refreshing! Andâ€¦ entertaining as well."

John could not argue there. "He _is _unique. Definitely a good idea to not make an enemy out of him.

And for the first time, the Master Chief heard the Arbiter giggle harmoniously and but most important, sincerely. "Noted."

* * *

><p>AN: "Elastic Heart" by Sia is truely a beautiful song. I just had to fit it in this story somehow. x)</p>

**We're moving on with the rest of the levels now! **

36. The End of Heartache

****Halo ****â€œ**** Katerina Duran - "Make It Last: Of Trust and Friendship"****

* * *

><p>Location: Observation Deck, UNSC Frigate
_**Forward onto Dawn
>_**November 20th, 2552**

"How are you feeling today?"

"Liberated, actually. I definitely needed to talk to someone about it all. I just never thought it would be you. After all, we are supposed to be enemies."

John gave the female Elite a half yet pleasant smile. "Well, as it turns out, you were never the enemy, Katerina. I'm glad to have you as a companion."

The Master Chief looked pretty much the same as he did yesterday. Katerina, however, had one slight change â€" instead of her Arbiter armor, she wore an emerald-green flowing gown with long bell sleeves. It had floral patterns of pale yellow all over. On the whole, the entire outfit made her look carefree - like she never went through everything that she had been through.

That sentence definitely brought yet another genuine smile to her face. "Well, in that caseâ€" my blade is yours, Spartan. Indefinitely."

"Good to know. Nice dress, by the way," He could not help but point out.

"Thank you! It is lovely to know that you like my work."

"Wait. You _made _this dress?" Was that what she meant?

She shrugged her shoulders lightly and in an 'it's-nothing-new' manner. "I make all of my dresses."

Highly impressed, he raised one eyebrow at that. "Well, you're really talented. Come on. Let's take a walk."

* * *

><p>The Master Chief and the Arbiter were walking side by side down the lengthy hallway of Forward Onto Dawn, engaging in conversation as they passed by several personnel, some of whom had puzzled or shocked looked on their faces at the sight.

John wasn't exactly looking for a new best friend or anything, and neither was Katerina. Yet, all of this started when she made the ultimate decision to assist him onboard the _Autumn_. She had a story to tell and he was the only one there to listen to it. It helped him understand that there were, in fact, some good individuals out there; they were just thrown into the wrong side of the war they had absolutely nothing to do with. Katerina, her family, and her entire State were some of those individuals. They fought for the side that

took almost everything away from them because that was the only way.

And now that everything had been unraveled, all of hell had been unleashed.

Not everything you saw was true. Katerina may have looked like your typical Covenant soldier, except she had a good reason to be one.

She could be trusted.

Katerina's arm was through John's as they took a slow walk. "So why the nickname 'Kate'? I mean, obviously it should be 'Kat', right?"

"I understand what you mean. Micah thought that it would be rather unique to hear. And I had to admit it, I quite liked it," She then glanced up at him. "You know, you may address me by 'Kate' if you wish. It would make it easier to yell at me when we are out on the battlefield."

"Johnson told me how you tore into that Brute when he called you that. Iâ€¦ don't really want you to tear out my tongueâ€¦" He said innocently.

Her grin was utterly dripping in mirth. "Now you know I would not do that to you! Are you always this playful?"

"No, not really. Although I never did like to lose."

"Always wanted to be the winner, then?"

"I learnt to share the glory."

"Good for you, then," He did not know whether she was being sarcastic or not. She was probably was. "So where _is _your wife?"

"â€¦ Excuse me?"

She cocked her head at him. "You said yesterday that you did not have any children. You did not mention anything about your wife."

"That's because I don't have one."

"Whaaaat? You are kidding!" She stopped walking and faced him. "Why not?"

_We're Spartans, Kate. We're a little different from regular marines.
_"There's a reason. Maybe I'll tell you about it someday."

She shrugged her shoulders at that, not bothered. "As you wish." She slipped her arm through his again and they continued their walk.

"Your two girls. What are they up to now?"

"Well, let us seeâ€¦ Melika still appears to hate the world. She keeps to herself most of the time, reading her books. Ana, however, is married with two boys."

"You're kidding," John said in disbelief.

"I am not!" She said in a laugh. "Savos was from the Isara Keep, our neighboring keep. He was great friends with Ana and Versera. He was orphaned during the attack and came to live in our Keep. He proposed to her about 13 years ago. They are happy together. Ana needs some joy in her life, anyways."

"Wish the same could go for Melika though,"

"I agreeâ€|" After a 3 second silence, Katerina then questioned, "Is thereâ€| any news of your A.I. companion, Cortana?"

"No," He answered quickly. "Not since the message."

She flashed a little smile. "Do not despair. Once we are done with Truth, we can dedicate out time and effort into getting her back safe and sound."

"I just hope we won't be too late."

"We will not," She swore. "So what kind of a person is she?"

"Person?"

"I am aware she is an A.I., but she sure does appear to be more human than machine. That is why I say so."

Thatâ€| was such a fascinating and truthful thing to say. John took a moment to take that in before replying. "Well, she's playful but damn effective. Very strong. We've been partnered together forâ€| a good 3 years now and she's been with me every step of the way. I'll be damned if we don't get her out of High Charity."

"But we will," Her violet cat-like eyes shined as she said that. "You do not have to worry a thing. If you believe in her as much as I think you do, then it will be alright."

"I made her a promise,"

"I will help you keep it."

* * *

><p>AN: I thought long and hard about making this chapter believable. I hope it was!
>

37. Nightmare Continues

Halo **â€|**** Katerina Duran - "Make It Last: Of Trust and Friendship"**

* * *

><p>Location: Installation 00
December 11th, 2552**

The Ark. Installation 00. They were finally here. In order to stop Truth from firing the Halo Rings, the first order of business was to set _Forward Onto Dawn_ safely down. Once that was settled, a Scarab made its unannounced arrival but it was quickly taken down. John reunited with Katerina briefly at the Ark's Cartographer before more Covenant Loyalists intervened, only to be defeated.

Man, don't they ever learn?

The Prophet of Truth was, according to 343 Guilty Spark, near one of the Ark's superluminal communication arrays. But now, a protective barrier surrounded it and it needed to be taken down. Three towers kept the barrier up so they needed to be destroyed. The Master Chief would take down one, the Elites another, and Sergeant Johnson the last.

"How're doing, Kate? Ready to get to Truth?"

"I have been waiting for this day for a very long time, John."

"Well, you're getting close now. I'll do my part, as promised."

The Chief and the Elites successfully took out the 2 towers respectively. It was all up to Johnson and his team.

"Speak to me, Katie,"

"All is well on our end. We are waiting for the Sergeant to do his part. He isâ€¦ taking a little long, isn't he?"

As if Commander Miranda Keyes heard their private conversation on the COM channels, she said, "Johnson, come in. Over."

On the COM channel, Johnson responded, but with much panic and static. "Brute reinforcements, ma'am! We're pinned down!"

"I'm on my way!" She said instantly.

"Negative! Fire's too heavy! Everyone fall bac-!"

"Sergeant Major! Johnson! Can you hear me?!" Miranda continued to try in vain. "Chief, you need to link up with the Arbiter and proceed directly to the Third Tower! Make your way back to the beach!"

"John, you have some trouble in the air. Deal with them and head to the third one!" Katerina told him.

"What about you?"

"This tower is fine. The Elites and I are making our way to the third now. Join us as soon as you can."

"You got it. Watch yourself."

"As always,"

* * *

><p>"Hit the switch, Chief, and the barrier will fall!"<p>

After providing air support and reuniting with Katerina, they made their way to the third tower and shut it down once and for all. There was no sign of Johnson anywhere though. Where could he be?

The barrier finally fell. The _Shadow of Intent_ makes its way to the Citadel, where Truth is located.

"Now, Prophet... your end has come!" Rtas 'Vadum declared over the COM.

From inside the tower, John and Katerina glanced up at the black skies, watching the carrier. Out of nowhere, just next to the _Shadow of Intent_, a Slipspace rupture materialized and from itâ€| High Charity emerged.

"What in the-"

"High Charity..." Rtas said in awe, cutting Katerina off. "By the Gods, brace for impact!"

"Rtas!" She screamed for him over the COM.

As High Charity flew over the Citadel, debris from it went right through the _Shadow of Intent's_ hull. More debris broke through the window that John and Katerina were looking out from and landed in right of the elevator they had just taken. The debris began to glow creepily, much to Katerina's dismay.

"Noâ€| no, no, no!"

"Get behind, Kate!" John told her, raising his Assault Rifle and pulling Katerina behind him. "Stay close to me. It's gonna be okay."

She did _not_ _think_ so.

Katerina pulled out one Magnum and placed her other hand on the Chief's shoulder â€" getting behind and staying close as promised. _As if_ she wanted to engage the Flood in close combat.

Human Combat Forms then emerged from the rubble, gargling and moaning in the way that they did and the Chief opened fire. Flood Infection Forms followed instantly, attempting to head for the fallen the fallen Brutes that the two had eliminated. Katerina, without much thinking, aimed for the little creatures and fired as well.

All was quiet. It did not look like there was anything else coming from that rubble. Katerina hung her head low, hands on her thighs as she tried to calm herself down.

John placed one hand behind her back. "You okay?"

"Why can't I escape this nightmare...? Why can't it just _end_?" She questioned, her voice weary.

"You can get through this. Don't worry, I'm here for you," He told her serenely. "Katie, we talked about this," John then sat the rifle

down and had her face him, his hands gripping her upper arms in a gentle manner. "You can't let what happened to Versera affect your performance. You did not kill him."

"I know! â€|I knowâ€|" She steadied herself with her hands on his armored chest. "The Flood are not invincible. We can defeat them. I can defeat them."

John gave a single nod at that. "That's right."

"Then let us continue. We cannot let the Flood stop us. There is no way Truth could have predicted the Flood's interference. It might only drive him to quickly finish his plans."

"Then we're gonna have to move it. Let's go."

* * *

><p>AN: A little chapter before Kate gets her hands on Truth!

>

38. It's Over

****Halo ****â€"**** Katerina Duran - "Make It Last: Of Trust and Friendship"****

* * *

><p>Location: Installation 00
December 11th, 2552**

The Shadow of Intent had suffered major damage and its weapons system was disabled after debris from High Charity smashed right through it. No one had any clue as to why the Flood would come here but that was the last thing to worry about on their list. Truth need to be stopped first.

Making their way to the Citadel, the team faced a great challenge: Ghosts, Banshees, Prowlers and Shade Turrets, all at one go. But their greatest challenge? Two Scarabs.

The Shadow of Intent was unable to provide anymore assistance at this point. It was all up to the Marines, the available Elites, the Master Chief and the Arbiter. The Master Chief and the Arbiter stuck close, taking control of a Scorpion Tank as their weapon of mass destruction, with Katerina driving.

"I remember you telling me something about our tanks being your personal favorites,"

"Exactly right! I honestly thought you did not pay any attention to me back then."

* * *

><p>Location: Citadel

They finally made it to the Citadel's entrance after a tiring and hard-fought battle. But Katerina was just getting started. She was

just waiting to get her hands on Truth and that desire kept her going. It had kept her going for all of these years.

Upon entering, the two found themselves in a large hallway with screens mounted on the walls and the Prophet of Truth's face plastered on the monitors. He was making another one of his speeches and that was when the duo spotted the missing Johnson behind him with a Brute holding him hostage.

"Oh no," Katerina gasped softly at the sight. "There, John! An elevator! It should take us to the control room where they are."

"Let's go!"

* * *

><p>"Why are you here today, Katerina?"
_

"_You know whyâ€|"_"

"_You left us no choice. You and your entire State were a hindrance to the Great Journey." _

"_Not anymore. We will join the Covenant." _

"_Will you now?"_

"_If it means securing the safety of my State, I will do your bidding. Just please, I beg of youâ€|" no more. We have lost too muchâ€|" _

"_You belong to us now. Welcome to the Covenant." _

As they impatiently rode the elevator up, Katerina found herself reliving the moment where she was on her knees before the three Prophets, pledging her allegiance to them. It was just making her all the more irate and bitter. She had this angered look on her flawless features that John just took notice of.

"Judging by that look on your face, I think it's best that I stay far, far away from you, Kate."

"I cannot help it. For so long, I have been humiliated by them all. I never thought this day would come but now it hasâ€|" Truth has to suffer, and I will make sure of it."

The Chief held his Assault Rifle with his left hand instead so he could give his companion's hand a slight squeeze, careful not to crush it. With a half-smile on her lips, she acknowledged it with a squeeze of her own.

Once the elevator came to a halt, the duo found that they were at the end of the Control Terminal. Six out of the seven rings lit up. Did Truth activate it already? Oh snap.

Two Flood Tank Forms dropped from above without any warning whatsoever, giving Katerina a great shock. "OH!" She took her position behind the Spartan once again, who aimed his Assault Rifle at them.

"Do not shoot, but listen! Let me lead you safely to our foe!" That voice that came from themâ€¦ it sounded just like the Gravemind. "Only you can halt what he has set in motion."

Holding onto the shoulders of her companion, she peered over his right shoulder. "Is that notâ€¦ the Gravemind?"

"Let's go," He told her, lowering his rifle in an extremely slow manner. "Come on." He took her by her left hand and led her past the two creatures.

Crossing the light bridge, the duo found themselves at the control panel, dead Brutes and shattered glass everywhereâ€¦ and the dead Miranda Keyes rested on Johnson's lap.

The duo halted instantly at the sight. They could not believe it at all. Miranda had come looking for the Sergeant, it appeared. To have it ended like this was not right at all.

Johnson closed her empty eyes. "Stop the rings," He told them. "Save the rest."

He was right. There were still many lives at stake. However, the Chief still could not comprehend this. His shoulders slumped as he shook his head, dishearten.

Katerina would have offered some words of comfort to them, but she picked up the soft groans of pain from the fallen Prophet of Truth. Lifting her head up, she found him near the control panel on his hands and knees.

Something came over the female Elite at that moment. She felt her blood boil at an intense level. So swiftly that even John had to take a second to realize what happened, she reached up and pulled his combat knife from his right shoulder pad and marched over to Truth.

"Katie-"

"Truth, you bastardâ€¦" Those words came from between the slats in a fence of gritted teeth.

"Can you see, Katerinaâ€¦?" He was ever so weak. "The moment of salvationâ€¦ is at hand."

She had had enough of those words. Katerina clutched his long neck tightly, John's combat knife in hand.

It was only then that the female Elite got a better look of Truth â€" his skin was a dull orange or brown, a color similar toâ€¦ the Flood. In fact, there were even Flood pores on his face. It just made Katerina feel even more repulsed.

"Your kind... never believed in the promise of the sacred ringsâ€¦" He said to her, no energy to resist the tight grasp on his neck.

"Oh, but they did. Most of them did! And this is what you do to them? They gave you _everything_, Truth. But you? You and Mercy and

Regretâ€¦ you all just kept on taking, did you not?"

John was now standing opposite Katerina, his rifle on Truth in case the Prophet was going to try anything.

"_What _did my State ask of the rest of the Sangheili race, of you? We asked that you leave us _alone._ Why did you not?" She questioned. "ANSWER ME, YOU MISERABLE PIECE OF-"

"Lies for the weak. Beacons for the deluded." It was the Gravemind again, this time speaking through. The infection was worse than it looked.

Those words may have interrupted Katerina but she sure was not done. "Lessa, Rho, Rernakâ€¦ Micahâ€¦ my family, my relatives, my friends, _all _of them _gone_! Today I get my revenge and oh, it will be sweetâ€¦"

"My feet tread the pathâ€¦" How much more of these lines did he even have? "I shall become a god!" Then, tiny tentacles suddenly sprouted from the pores on Truth's face and the Gravemind spoke once more. "You will be _food_â€¦ nothing more."

By then, John had approached the Ark's control panel and hit the button to deactivate it successfully.

"No!" Truth said in vain, his plans having come to an abrupt end. Katerina's hold on his neck softened. "I... am..._Truth_! The voice of the Covenant!" He declared with whatever little energy he had left.

"Just shut UP!" She screeched, driving the combat knife right into Truth's neck in a blink of an eye. Truth's gasp was barely above a whisper. She pulled it out and let his body slump to the ground, only for her to use the knife to stab his chest over and over again. As she stabbed, the emotions were letting themselves go; she let out a cry at each stab.

John didn't do or say anything at the first 8 or 9 stabbings. But it became clear to him that she had absolutely no intention or had no control of stopping.

"Kate? Kate, that's enough," He told her calmly, with no result. "Katie, you can stop now, he's dead."

The calls of her companion were falling on deaf ears. "Kate, _stop_!" He dropped the rifle and grabbed her by the waist. "Katie, that's enough! He's _dead_!"

"Let me GO, John!" She ordered in between her sobs, losing possession of the combat knife and hammering at his arms that were around her waist.

"Katie, he's dead now, you killed him!" He put her down on her knees, not letting her go. "_Look _at me, Katie!" He brought his hands to her cheeks, forcing her to look at him. "It's _over_! You did it! He's dead! You finally did it."

Katerina wanted to say something to him. She was trying to. But all she could manage was a hard cry. Immediately, he pulled her into his

arms and hugged her tightly. Her head into his armored chest, she wrapped her arms around him and cried. She was crying just as hard as she did when Micah was last in her own arms.

John held the female Elite close to him, hushing her in a mellow tone. "It's okay, Katie. It's gonna be okay."

39. Betrayal II

Halo **â€"**** Katerina Duran - "Make It Last: Of Trust and Friendship"**

* * *

><p>Location: Installation 00
December 11th, 2552**

"It's okay, Katie. It's going to be okay."

The female Elite had never heard anything so comforting in her life before. Almost immediately, her loud cries softened. "Let it go. You're fine now." As he patted her back gently, the Spartan turned his head to find Sergeant Johnson back on his feet and carrying the dead Commander Miranda Keyes into the back on the pelican.

John sighed epically, turning his head back Katerina and resumed consoling her.

All seemed quiet. Way too quiet.

It was then the ground began to tremble violently and the next thing they knew, large tentacles emerged and surrounded them. The duo hurried to their feet with John reaching over and grabbing his dropped rifle and Katerina grabbing the combat knife. Maniacal laughter filled the deadly air.

The Gravemind.

"That laughter certainly doesn't sound joyous to me!"

By then, Johnson had already powered up the pelican. "Come on!" John climbed onto the Ark's control panel and grabbed the pelican's landing gear. "Grab my hand." Katerina does so in a tight grasp.

In the control room window, there was a large hole, created by Miranda when she drove her pelican straight through it. Johnson attempted to ride the pelican out the hole when the duo were rudely knocked off by the Gravemind's tentacles, sending them swirling in mid-air before landing next to the Control Panel.

"Now the gate has been unlatchedâ€| headstones pushed aside...corpses shift and offer roomâ€| a fate you must _abide_"

_Not in a million years, _John thought as he pushed himself off the ground. He gazed around for his companion. Katerina was struggling to her feet, one hand on her back with a pained expression on her face.

Taking another glance, they found themselves surrounded by several Flood forms, all ready to attack. Katerina readied one Magnum as well

as John's combat knife, and the Spartan readied his Assault Rifle. They came back-to-back.

It was pretty clear what was going on: the Gravemind had betrayed them. Why hadn't they seen it coming? There was no way Humans and the Flood could live in peace.

"We trade one villain for another," The female Elite said, highly irritated.

"They just keep on coming," After a small pause, he asked, "You ready?"

"Always."

Katerina fired the first shot, taking out a Tank form perched on the Ark's control panel. And then it felt as if all of hell had broken loose. As they took down everything in sight, Johnson got on the COM channel and told them to head back to the lift and find a way down; the pelican had suffered some damage.

Acknowledging, Katerina suggested they run and shoot everything in their way. "They may keep on coming. We cannot stay here and shoot forever!"

John agreed. So they jogged to the direction of the elevator, trying their hardest not to slow down but Carrier and Infection Forms were proving to make that difficult.

The lift was in clear view, but it was also inactive. "Oh, you have GOT to be-"

"Down there!" John pointed to a shaft at the back of the elevator room. "Jump down!" He ordered her, tossing a grenade behind them.

Just as they heard the _boom! _from that grenade, the duo had already dived into the shaft, with John landing perfectly on his feet but with Katerina somehow landing on her back. "OW!"

John hurried and crawled over to her, helping her to sit up. Katerina massaged her lower back as she whimpered, "Owâ€|"

This shaft appeared to have led them to a mysterious underground hallway. And in that hallway, the Spartan caught flickering image of small, in a shade of blue or purple, running away from them and turning into a corner.

What in the-

His imagination started to run wild. Instinctively, John got to his feet but unfortunately, he was the support for the female Elite so when he got up, she fell behind and on her back again. "Whoa-ow!"

Drawing his breath in a hiss, he took her by her hands and pulled her up to her feet. "Sorry!"

"I am getting _much _too old for thisâ€|!" She moaned as she arched her back.

John however, was still intrigued by the image he saw and took off in a jog. Highly confused (and maybe slightly annoyed), Katerina followed suit but at a much slower pace. "John? What is it?"

Katerina's honeyed voice felt like a million miles away to him. Walking around that corner, the same image appeared for a split second before disappearing again.

_Cortana. _

"John, what is it? What do you see?"

Was that really Cortana? What was she even doing here? Getting around another corner, he found a control panel at the end of the hallway. Cortana appeared once more, this time above the control panel, before vanishing.

"John, why are you not answering me? What do you see?"

Katerina turned the corner at last to see the control panel. She ran up to the Spartan just before he activated the panel.

When he did activate it, the 'wall' in front of them slid open. The duo found that there was a balcony for them to step out onto so they do. They appeared to be back outside, with the thickest of fogs blocking their view of below.

However, in that fog, something was moving. They gazed in awe as an obviously incomplete Halo rise up from _inside _the Ark's core.

Such an unbelievable sight. "Itâ€¦ it is a Halo. It looks unfinished," Katerina said, her violet cat-like eyes glittering at the sight. "John? Is thisâ€¦ is this meant toâ€¦ _replace _the one you destroyed?"

The helmet was certainly restricting her view of his expression right now. "When did you know?"

Katerina knew he was not talking to her. Glancing behind her, 343 Guilty Spark almost (sheepishly) hovered up and met them. "Just nowâ€¦ but... I had my hopes. What will you do?" He questioned after a short pause.

"Light it."

"What?" The female Elite crocked her neck to her companion.

Spark, however, was openly overjoyed. "Then we are agreed! A tactical pulse will completely eradicate the local infestation!" He told them as he flew elatedly around the duo. "I will personally oversee the final preparations! Though it will take time toâ€¦" By the last statement, the monitor had already gone full thrusters towards his new Halo.

"I-I do not understand,"

John scanned the Halo Ring before them. "I could have sworn I saw Cortana just now. She _led me _to this control panel. This," He

pointed towards Halo. "_This _was her plan all along. Activate Halo at its premature stage and destroy everything here."

Katerina herself glanced at Halo, trying to find meaning in that. "Perhaps you are right. But even if you were, my boy, you would need an Index. We would have to go hunting for it on this Halo, _only _if it has already been made, of courseâ€|"

"No need." And he looked to his right.

High Charity.

* * *

><p>AN: I just realized that this story passed 7 months!

>

40. Whatever It Takes

Halo **â€|"**** Katerina Duran - "Make It Last: Of Trust and Friendship"**

* * *

><p>Location: UNSC Frigate Forward Unto Dawn
December 12th, 2552**

"Wait, are you sure about this?"

"Well, you cannot walk into High Charity alone! What if one of thoseâ€| Stalkers try to bite you?"

John arched one eyebrow at that, but was also amused by how innocent his companion sounded. "Iâ€| think I can prevent that from happening, Kate. I just don't want you to be traumatized."

"In order to conquer your fear, you must face it, right? I cannot be running away forever, John!" Katerina responded strongly. "Trust me, if I could, I would have Dar accompany you but Rtas has need of him andâ€| I am not too sure if the both of you have learnt to play nice or not."

"He pointed a gun to my head!"

"Well, you were manhandling me!"

"Katie, you _know_ I didn't 'manhandle' you!"

"Not to the eyes of my loving firstborn," She said with a cheeky smile.

So was she always this stubborn? "I tell you what. Since it's your birthday, and I don't have a proper gift for you, I guess you can have this. BUTâ€| you're gonna stay in my sight the whole time."

"Fair enough. And as for a proper gift, why not present me with a new Magnum?" She suggested, and then gasped dramatically. "You can even

have it personalized for me!"

"Keep dreamin', Katie."

"What is that phrase Humans use? 'A girl can dream, can't she'?"

* * *

><p>Location: High Charity

Ungracefully landing the banshee onto the infested surface of High Charity, Katerina slipped out of the vehicle with a disgusted look on her face, much to the amusement of the Master Chief. He leaned against his own Banshee, arms cross his chest, a smirk on his lips. "How was the flight?"

"_Wonderful_..." She said grimly. Lifting her hoof up, she pulled yet, another repulsed face upon seeing the Flood mass had stuck to it. "Aw, for Duran's sake...!"

"Not too late to go back, you know,"

"Well unfortunately, we have become far too close."

"Why 'unfortunately'? It should be a good thing!" He said, pushing himself off the Banshee. John took a moment to gaze at their surroundings. They had found an opening in High Charity for them to land on. Now it was time to head further in and find Cortana.

"Is she...?"

"No telepathic messages yet... But I do have a lock on her location." He said, looking at his HUD.

"Perfect," She then pulled out both her Magnums from their holsters. "Then let us do this. Oh, and John?"

"Yes?"

She flashed a small smile. "Whatever happens, you keep moving forward, alright? Find Cortana."

John relaxed his shoulders and rolled his eyes at that.

"Katieâ€|"

"Anything can happen, my boy. I just want to remind you of the main objective here."

* * *

><p>"Where is she exactly?"<p>

"Just past what used to be the reactor room."

The duo walked quickly but they didn't run. Them arriving had not attracted any Flood forms and they planned to keep it that way. But it did not stop the Gravemind though.

"Child of my enemy, why have you come? I offer no forgiveness. A father's sinsâ€| pass to his son."

"John?" Katerina tugged at his arm, noticing that he had suddenly slowed down.

"It was the Gravemind," He told her, grabbing his head.

"Shake it off, my boy. You cannot let him slow you down. We must find Cortana!"

He gave his head a slight shake. Katerina was right. He could not let these telepathic messages slow him down. They needed to save Cortana from that monster.

Walking through a porta, they were instantly faced with Infection Forms, scaring Katerina greatly (as usual). Firing at them, they popped like balloons, but they kept on coming. Carrier forms lurked nearby, not making their job any easier.

"We need to keep moving!" She yelled over the sound of their firing weapons and the exploding Flood forms. "I do not think they will stop coming at us!"

Once again, she was right. The Gravemind was going to try anything to keep them out. "Alright. Then keep close to me."

So they ran and shot anything in front or around them. They jumped down a porta they found at the end of the current level they were in— only to be met with several Stalkers in this new room.

The moment Katerina was (almost) face-to-face with one, she let out a horrified gasp and instinctively fired her Magnums at it.

John practically sprayed his surroundings with bullets from his Assault Rifle. According to his HUD, they would have to find a Terminal and run past it to further enter the Hive and locate Cortana.

_"Of course, you came for **her**... We exist together now. Two corpses, in one grave..." _

That thing needs to get out of my head right now before I get really pissed, he thought, as he battled through the message and took out one more Stalker.

But what really made the Master Chief stop in his tracks was _"A collection of lies; that's all I am! Stolen thoughts and memories!..." _

That was so not a telepathic message, because Katerina heard it too. "Hang in there, Cortana—" She said softly to herself, pulling at his arm to get him to keep going.

"_And yet, perhaps a part of her... remains?"_

The Terminal was in an enormous Flood-infested room (which part of High Charity had the Flood not covered?). They had no choice but to keep running and shooting everything because of the overwhelming amount of enemies.

_"It was the coin's fault! I wanted to make you strong, keep you

safe... I 'm sorry, I can't..."_

"Through these tunnels and the reactor room will be above us," He told her. She could tell he was going everything he could to keep his emotions in place.

The tunnels felt like a never-ending walk for them. Except that they didn't walk, they jogged. The Spartan made sure that his Elite companion stuck close to hi the entire time. The tunnels were silent the time being so he clasped her hand and they picked up the speed.

"I'm just my Mother's shadow... Don't look at me, don't listen! I'm not who I used to be..."

At the end of the tunnel, they went through another porta and met with more Stalker and Pure forms. John instantly tossed a fragmentation grenade to shake things up and the duo opened fired at anything and everything that was coming at them.

"The reactor room's upstairs! We need to get up there!" He told her, stepping in front of her and shielding her from the spikes from a Pure form wielding a Brute Spiker.

"Let us hurry!"

Not if the Gravemind can help it._"Time has taught me _patience_! But basking in new freedom, I _will_ know all that I _**possess**_"_

Once that last sentence passed though, the room began to quake slightly. From behind them, the Flood mass on the ground erupted like a volcano and out came a singleâ€| tentacle. The Gravemind's tentacle to be precise.

It was so unbelievably quick when that tentacle wrapped around Katerina's left leg.

"What the- **AH**!" She landed on her stomach, losing possession of one Magnum only. "John!"

John immediately gave chase."Kate, _no_"

"John, don't let it take me!" And she found that the Spartan, in a single leap, managed to grab her wrists.

"Hang on, Kate!"

A second tentacle made its appearance, this time in a single flick, sent the duo flying. John's back connected with a wall and he was close to landing on his head. Katerina was just in front of him, her tired eyes searching for the Chief.

On her knees, she began to crawl towards him. "Oh noâ€| Johnâ€|"

But then, the Gravemind had his one tentacle on her leg once again. "Ah! Let me go! LET ME GO!" She demanded in shrieks, turning her head to try her best at firing her lone Magnum into the tentacle. But all she had was two shots and they both missed.

"John! John, help me! John, help me, _please_" Her pleas were only in vain. She saw he was moving but he wasn't getting up and running for her. Her heart was beating like a drum, ready to explode out of pure fear. "_Please, _John, _ don't let it take meeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee_!"

And she disappeared into the darkness of the hole created by the tentacles.

"Katie!" John stumbled towards the sound of her frightened voice, only to find the hole there. "No, Kate!"

Where had that thing taken her to?

He got onto the COM channel to try to contact her, but all he got was static in return. Wherever the Gravemind had taken her, it was through this hole.

But he also had to find Cortana.

But then, what about Kate?

In a fit of irritation and anger, he kicked the nearby a dead Pure form and he remembered what she had told him only minutes before.

"_Whatever happens, you keep moving forward, alright? Find Cortana."_

41. Hanging On

Halo ** "**** Katerina Duran - "Make It Last: Of Trust and Friendship"****

* * *

><p>Location: High Charity
December 12th, 2552**

Peering into the large hole, John almost whispered to himself, "Hang in there, Kate. I'm about to get Cortana. And then I'm going to tear this hellhole apart to find you."

Getting back to his feet, he gripped his Assault Rifle tightly in his hands and took off to the direction of where Cortana was.

* * *

><p>Katerina shifted on the cold ground. When she finally cracked open her eyes, she hadn't had the slightest clue where she was.<p>

Sitting up, she instantly felt the stinging pain at the back of her head and winced painfully. She then thanked her lucky stars that she was not sitting on the infested ground.

Glancing around, she realized that her Spartan companion was not with her. "John?"

No answer.

Getting onto the COM channel, he was not answering either. "No... John, _please _answer!"

Just static.

She hated that so much. The last thing she wanted was to be alone in a Flood Hive. Perhaps it was a bad idea, but there was no way she could let her Spartan companion do this alone.

She got to her knees and searching for her missing Magnums. She knew she lost one when the Gravemind was dragging her away. Where was the other one?

Damn it! Must have lost it as well.

She still had the lone Energy Sword attached to her right thigh and her two wrist blades. She was going to have to make do with them.

She slowly got to her hooves, still massaging the back of her head. Man, did it sting. "Ow..."

Katerina needed to get to the Chief. But she did not have the slightest clue where he was. She was going to have to keep walking until she could get a clear connection to him on the COM Channel.

She hadn't even taken two steps forward when a single thunderous thump that came from behind her stopped her.

* * *

><p>Meanwhile...

"Just keep your head down, okay? There's two of us in here now, remember,"

He kind of missed all her witty and playful remarks. "Sure thing. And I hate to have you go to work immediately, but I need your help."

"Sounds important,"

"It is. I need you to track down Katerina for me." John requested, reloading his Assault Rifle as quick as he could.

And of course, Cortana was unsure of who this Katerina was. "Mind telling me who this Katerina is, Chief? You seeing someone?"

"She's the female Elite who saved our lives."

And of course, Cortana did not reply instantly. "You're kidding. When did you two learn to play nice?"

"Long story, and an incredible one at that," Done with his rifle, he stopped to address his A.I. companion. "The Gravemind took her. I can't contact her at all. She's got some really bad experience with the Flood; the last thing I want is for her to be alone in a place like this."

"How are you so sure she's even _alive_?"

A smirk came to him right then. "If you hear what she's been through, you'll know she's hard to kill. And besides, even if she was, and I _know _she isn't, deadâ€¦ we're still not leaving without her."

* * *

><p>Meanwhileâ€¦|

"GET AWAY FROM ME! GO AWAY! **GO AWAY**! I cannot BELIEVE that there are more of these _things_! Stop CHASING ME! GO AWAY!"

A Juggernaut. It was _another _Juggernaut.

Katerina took off instantly, screaming in absolute fear, but the damned thing was hunting her. She needed to find a place to hide or at least a place where it would be too narrow for the Juggernaut to follow her.

A loud gasp and she halted in her tracks. She was facing a wall.

Dead end.

"Oh no!" She spun around and ducked when the Juggernaut's tentacle was coming for her. It got caught in the wall so she took this opportunity to run past its legs, unsheathed her Energy Sword and struck it right at one of its legs. It wasn't enough to sever it though; all it did was moan in pain.

But whatever! It was distracted, so she ran.

However, with quickness that could not be explained, the Juggernaut freed its arm and swung it at Katerina, who was almost sent flying halfway across the room. _I hate you so much, you enormous, disgusting abomination!_

She landed flat on her back, grunting in pain. She heard and felt the Juggernaut getting closer and she rolled out of the way just in time before it could bring its tentacle down on her.

Retrieving her Energy Sword, she needed to think of a game plan. _How _to defeat a Juggernaut with just an Energy Sword?

Katerina and the Juggernaut were at a standoff. She knew she had to aim for the leg she had injured earlier. It would then make things easier for her.

So she dodged another attempted stab, and ran for its legs.

And the Juggernaut lifted its injured leg backwards, preventing the female Elite from even touching it.

"What in the name of-"

Shocked, she spun around once againâ€¦ only to be met with the Juggernaut's tentacle through her torso.

The reality of her current situation came to her. Her Energy Sword slipped from her grasp and she was hammering at its arm. Its sharp end penetrated her Arbiter armour but not enough to go through her. She found herself writhing in agony.

With quick thinking, she fished out one of her two Plasma Grenades and activated it. To her, it felt like an extremely stupid idea but she had no choice. She stuck the sticky grenade onto its arm and, with an incredible amount of effort, pulled herself off the blade and fell to her side, putting everything into stumbling away as fast as she could.

The grenade exploded and thankfully she was far enough away. Hugging the wall, she turned her head to find that the Juggernaut's arm had been completely blown off. Its shriek indicated that it was in disbelief.

Taking advantage of the distraction, she pulled out the other Plasma Grenade and tossed it right at the Flood creature, where it stuck right onto its body. She shielded her eyes from the explosion and when the rumbling stopped, she looked to find that a piece of the Juggernaut's body had been blown right off.

Mission accomplished.

Katerina wrapped one arm around her torso " the Juggernaut had got her right below her chest. Her head felt heavy but she had to keep moving and find John. She just _had _to.

She was practically staggering as she went to retrieve her fallen Energy Sword. She made it past the Juggernaut's body, but was losing control soon after, breathing heavily and having stars in her vision.

She fell forward, on her hands and knees, before lying on her back. Her fingers were crawling all over her wound, trying her hardest to stop the bleeding. _Not the best way to spend my 67__th__ birthday, _she thought.

_Is this truly the end? I die in the same place where I gave up everything? _

_I always thought I was difficult to kill. Well, that has come to an end. _

_John doesn't even know where I am. How is he going to find me?
_

_At least let him find Cortana. She needs him. _

_And me? I think" I think I need to try my best to hold on. Maybe" maybe John _will _come and find me. He will, won't he? "I always keep my promises", he told me. _

_But I don't think he promised to find me if I were to ever be lost.
_

No.

_I believe in our trust. I believe in our friendship. He'll" he'll

come and find me. _

_But if not, I will be contented if he and Cortana made it safely out of this hell. _

Because no one else deserves to die in here more than I do, for this was the place where I caused the downfall of my State's happiness.

* * *

><p>AN: Halo 5's been announced. **

**And I still haven't stopped fangirl-ing. **

Nope, I can't get an Xbox One and that sucks. But it's totally fine with me. Get me access to the cutscenes and I'll be good. x)_

>

42. This Moment

Halo â€" Katerina Duran - "Make It Last: Of Trust and Friendship"

* * *

><p>"You keep only several people close to you, do you not?"

_ "It's... the way it's been with me. Doesn't mean I don't have a heart." _

_ "I never said that," She giggled. "But I am guessing that I am the first non-Human you befriended?" _

_ "You guessed right, Kate. And I'd like our friendship to last a long time." _

_ "It just might. I know I would never do anything to make you doubt me. After all, you seem to understand me perfectly." _

_ "I just.. know what's it's like to have everything stolen from you."

>

_ "W-what... do you mean, my boy?" _

_ "I'll tell you about it one day, okay?" _

* * *

><p>Location: High Charity
December 12th, 2552**

"_There could be dark skies... and the fiercest of storms... Don't be afraid... you won't be alone... I will do... whatever it takes to bring... you... home..." _

The second verse of Katerina's lullaby left her lips in a frail

manner as she stared at the ceiling and took in short, shallow breaths. All seemed quiet in here right now. It was only her and her lullaby.

"Kate?"

That voice...

She rolled her head to her left and there he was: Micah. Her husband.

"... Micah?"

Micah was here. With her. He was in his green robes, one that matched his apple-green eyes. She loved that outfit - she had made it for him. With a sad smile, he walked up to her, knelt beside her and placed one hand over her bloodied ones, which were still trying to cover her wound. "Kate, my love... what happened to you?"

"Does it matter, darling? You are here right now..." She tried for a smile, and it was a genuine yet small one.

"Yes, well, it has been quite long since I have seen your face, has it not?"

"Too long, Micah."

He leaned in a little closer, his other hand stroking her head. "Kate, you must hang on a little longer. I am sure help is on the way for you."

She kept her smile. "What if I do not want the help, Micah? I would much rather join you and the children, wherever you all are." One bloodied hand reached up to cup his cheek.

"No, no..." Micah hushed her gently, shaking his head. "Do not say that, Kate. Darius needs you. The girls need you. Our grandchildren need you. You cannot leave them. You have survived worst, my dear. This is nothing. Stay strong, won't you?"

Looking deep into his eyes, she almost whispered, "I think... it's over..." Her hand slid down to his shoulder.

"No, it is not," He told her sternly. "That Spartan is coming to get you. He will not forsake you."

"Micah, please..." She struggled a breath. "You and I are here now. Can we not savor this moment?"

He did not stay anything. He just gave her one more smile, leaned in and placed a soft peck on her forehead. Then he got to his feet.

"Micah...?" He caught her hand before it fell.

Katerina did not even pick up the distant gunfire.

Micah did not say anything. He placed her hand on where her wound was and slowly began to back away from her, keeping his "smile".

"Micah..." She stretched out her hand to him, trying to get him to come back.

"Katie, are you there?"

Wait, that was not Micah. He never called her that. The only person who called her Katie was-

"Katie!" This time, the voice was more frantic. And the Master Chief came running in, who came to a stop at Katerina's side. "Katie, are you alright?"

Her eyes were still on Micah, who was still backing away.

"Micah..." It was so soft that the Spartan missed it.

"Kate, look at me. Kate, I need you to look at me!" He cupped both her cheeks and she finally looked at the orange visor.

Both her bloodied hands gripped his wrists. "John..."

"Chief, if you get her some biofoam _right now_, she's got a chance!"

"You're gonna be fine," John's tone was much more calmer now. Slipping his hands under her knees and upper back, he picked up the fallen female Elite effortlessly. "We're getting out of here."

As he proceeded out of the room they were in, John picked up a single word that left her lips before she passed out and this time, he did not miss it. "Micah...?"

43. Going Home

Halo **â€"**** Katerina Duran - "Make It Last: Of Trust and Friendship"**

* * *

><p>Location: En route to Installation 04 (II)
December 12th, 2552**

"How's she doing?"

"The biofoam's holding. You did a good job on it. She's going to be fine, but I were her, I'd stay away from combat,"

The Master Chief glanced to his right at the AI console that beamed to life briefly, before turning back to the skies. "Agreed. But we can't go until she wakes up. I want to make sure she's conscious before leaving her aboard the _Shadow of Intent_, while the rear port engine's still working."

Cortana tilted her head at that, a small smile on her lips. "You really think she'll listen to you?"

He took a second to think about that, and answered with, "Nope," He looked down at her once again. "She's a stubborn one."

"Just like you. Maybe that's why you two get along,"

_Amongst other things. _

"Do not even _think _of leaving me behind, John,"

John instantly turned his head behind to find his companion struggling to sit up on the Pelican seats. She then realized that her torso was neatly bandaged and how she almost felt next to no pain. Despite that, her head felt a little heavy.

"Katie- Cortana, can you control the Pelican? Keep heading to the carrier,"

"No, please keep heading towards Halo,"

"Kate, please, I need to get you somewhere safe."

"And have you finish this fight alone?"

"I'm not alone in this," He quickly grabbed the seat next to her. "But I can't afford to lose you again,"

Katerina flashed him a small smile. "You are not going to lose me. Trust me when I say I've been through much worse. A bullet barely missed one of my hearts once."

"Kate-"

"This is _our _fight, John. And I will see it finished."

A huge displeased sigh left the Spartan. "What is it going to take to get you to stay on the carrier?"

"Absolutely nothing," She turned her head away and faced the empty space in front of her.

"Then head to Halo, Cortana," He instructed, but kept his stare on his Elite companion.

"Thank you," Katerina said softly, the clear sadness in her violet eyes.

"What's bothering you, Kate?"

A few blinks and she was tearing up. "Everything I've done for far, everything single thingâ€¦ it was for Micah. For Lessa. The twins. Versera. You can't ask me to leave at the very end, my boy. Does that not defeat the purpose? I mean, what would Micah think of me?"

"I can't speak for him, Kate, butâ€¦ he'd probably be happy that you're still here." John did not get any sort of reply from her. He titled his head at her, trying to read her the best he could. "You whispered his name before passing out. Is _that's _what's really troubling you?"

A forced smile and she nodded. "He was there. Holding my hand, telling me to hang onâ€¦ It felt _real_. That moment felt real. I _actually _thought he was with me physically. How _wrong _I wasâ€¦"

She then turned her head to him. "You once told me you understood how I felt because you knew what it was like to have everything stolen from you, right? While I do not know what you mean by that, let me give you a piece of advice " everyone you have lost so far, remember them as they had lived. Not as they died," With that, she glanced down at her hands. "Unlike what I have done for so long"

With nothing more to say to comfort his Elite companion, the Chief simply ran a hand up and down her back in a soothing manner. "It'll be okay. I promise."

In the meantime, the pelican was getting closer to the Control Room. Johnson had the Frigate, _Forward Unto Dawn_, and had landed it at a safe distance from the Control Room.

"Chief, the rear port engine's not going to make it an easy landing,"

"Aren't crash landings my specialty?" He said as he climbed into the pilot's seat.

Though he could not see Katerina's face, he knew for a fact that she smiled at his comment.

A snowy canyon near the Control Room was the best place for the Pelican to land what with its condition. Once assured by Katerina that she was secure, he made a crash landing.

John clambered out of the Pelican first, scanning his surroundings. "Halo. It's so new... unfinished," Cortana said. "I'm not exactly sure what will happen when we fire it."

He gave his hand to Katerina who climbed out of the Pelican with no difficulty whatsoever. She landed him his Assault Rifle and readied her twin Magnums. "We'll head for the Portal,"

Then he looked at Katerina to say, "And we'll all go home."

* * *

><p>AN: 9 days for a short chapter?
>

Writer's block is a pain. .

44. The Way The World Ends

Halo **"**** Katerina Duran - "Make It Last: Of Trust and Friendship"**

* * *

><p>Location: Installation 04 (II)
December 12****th****, 2552**

"You're stronger than you look, Kitty Kat. But don't overdo it, okay? If the Chief finds you on the floor, he'll just panic."

A soft giggle came to the female Elite. "If you say so, Cortana."

John turned his head slightly to say, "She's got a point there,"

"The Control Room isn't far, you two. Head through the cliffs."

* * *

><p>Through icy caves, the trio arrived at the foot of the pyramid-like Control Room.<p>

"That was easy enough," Katerina commented, somehow feeling relieved. Without the Flood to worry about, things were going to be much easier.

"Control Room's at the top of th-"

Cortana was cut off when Flood dispersal pods came crashing down from the heavens.

**"DID YOU THINK ME... _DEFEATED?_"

>

>"Of ALL the-" Katerina put two bullets into a oncoming Brute Combat Form after it broke out of its pod. "That beast is not dead yet?! You said that High Charity exploded as we left!"

"It _did!_" John yelled over the sound of his assault rifle.

"Forget about getting me personalized Magnums then! Having that _thing _dead would be the _perfect _birthday present after it tried to kill me!"

"Run and shoot, you two! Head for the ramps; they lead straight to the top!" Cortana cut in, frantic upon seeing all the Flood dispersal pods.

"Katie, go for the ramps! Clear a path for us!"

"I am on it!"

* * *

><p>Location: Control Room

Katerina took out all of her anger on any and all oncoming Flood forms. Although her torso was restricting some of her moves, the biofoam made it possible to still kick some ass. Sergeant Johnson came to the duo's with a Spartan Laser in hand. Katerina might have just found her new favorite weapon.

The door to the Control Room unlocked. Assured it was empty, John, Katerina and Johnson took a few steps in. From behind them, at a distance, the screeches of the Flood could be heard, but they dismissed it once the doors closed on them.

It was all or nothing now.

John removed Cortana's data chip from the back of his helmet and

tossed it to the Sergeant. He began to move to the control panel and the duo watched as he did. 343 Guilty Spark then descended from above, humming to himself and greeting Johnson and they now both headed for the control panel.

Katerina continued to watch them while John was watching the door.
" 'Kitty-Kat'?"

John shrugged his shoulders as a playful smile formed on his lips.
"She likes you,"

"I _do _like the nickname very much,"

"What, it's better than the one I gave you?"

"John, I love them both equally!"

"Don't go breaking my heart now, Kate."

"Now John, you know for the fact that I will never do that to you!" She smiled sweetly at him. "You are a darling boy and I will never break your heart." She reached up and patted the side of his helmet as if she was patting his cheek.

It was then that a chilling scream released by Johnson tore through the silent air.

"Unacceptable! _Unacceptable!_ Absolutely **_unacceptable_**!" Guilty Spark said in pure anger, his blue eye now having turned red.

Katerina was frozen in place by what had been done to the Sergeant, but John was already on the move, running to Johnson. Another blast from Sparks's eye and it hurled John backwards, dropping his energy shields.

"Protocol dictates action!" Spark exclaimed.

"John, **_no_**!" Katerina shrieked, running towards him. "AH!" Spark's next shot was long and powerful, sending Katerina all the way to the door, with which her back connected with.

"I see now that helping you is _wrong_!"

The Chief, having already gotten to his knees, turned his head back to the fallen Arbiter. "Katie!"

Spark blasted the wounded Spartan once again. With his armor's shields not in effect, his armor began to smoke. John had to catch his breath. He needed to wait for the shields to recharge.

That was when Spark had his big blue eye in the visor of the Spartan. "You are the child of my makers. Inheritor of _all they left behind_!" He mocked in sing-song. "You _are_ Forerunner! But this ring..." He shoved his red eye into the face of the Chief once again. "â€| is _mine_."

And with that, Spark fired what felt like a repulsion field that forced John backwards.

The Monitor hovered over the control panel, with John getting to his feet and retrieving his dropped Assault Rifle. Thank goodness he had been tossed right next to it.

"I take no pleasure in doing what must be done!"

He fired an entire magazine into Spark, with the bullets just bouncing off him. "You do not deserve this ring!" Another blast from his eye forced the Spartan to halt his firing and get out of the way. "I have kept it safe. It belongs to me!"

"Ehâ€¦ not for long!"

A powerful shot from a Spartan Laser that seemed to have come out of nowhere, sent Guilty Spark halfway across the Control Room and out of John's sight.

How Johnson managed to sit up and fire that Spartan Laser is something John will never understand, but he was so grateful. He jogged over to the fallen Sergeant who placed the weapon into his hands. He leaned in as much as he could to whisper, "Kick his assâ€¦" before seemingly falling unconscious. John caught him in time and gently placed him on the ground.

John lowered his head instinctively at the sound of another shot from Spark. This shot however, had seemed to miss the Spartan completely. Rising to his feet and the Spartan Laser in hand, he found the Monitor in a terrible shape: hovering at a tilted angle, his casing cracked, sparks emitting from his bodyâ€¦

_Damn. _

"D-Damage! _Damage!_ That hurt, Reclaimer!"

"GOOD!" John heard an irritated female voice yell and the next thing he knew, a plasma grenade stuck to Spark's body that subsequently exploded. Blue plasma began leaking from his sides.

Katerina was on one knee, one arm around her torso trying to hold together the burnt bandages.

"A-ccept your le-gacy..!" Spark could barely complete a sentence at this point, let alone have it make any sense.

This was the best time to start firing some shots. Hefting the Spartan Laser onto his shoulder, John took aimâ€¦ and fired.

Following the shot, pieces of the Monitor started to fly off. The sparks became more vicious and more plasma leaked. "I a-a-am the M-Monitor of Installation Z-Zero F-F-Four!" he declared in a broken and frantic tone. It gave the Spartan Laser enough time to cool down.

"One more should just about do it, my boy! Hurry!"

And it did. With one final shot, 343 Guilty Spark screamed in agony, his entire body lighting up before finally exploding to bits.

The Spartan let go of a much needed sigh, lowering the Spartan Laser.

Were there going to be any more surprises, though? Anyone else going to betray them?

John saw Katerina struggling to her feet, one arm still wrapped around her torso as she tried to push herself off the ground to stand up. "Kate," He dropped the Laser and hurriedly jogged over. She accepted his hands and he effectively pulled her up to her feet. "Are you okay?"

To his surprise, she had a wide smile on her face as she began to chuckle. "Never better. You might have to get me new bandages though. I barely have anything covering me now," She said as she pulled off the loosened bandages. A single layer was all that's left now.

"We'll fix you up aboard the Dawn. You'll be good as new." He said with his own smile.

Hers disappeared like smoke though, when she spotted Johnson shifting on the ground. "Oh no. Sergeant!"

The duo ran over to his side as fast as they could. On one knee, John turned him over to his back. Katerina gently placed his head on her lap, quietly begging him to open his eyes. "Speak to us, Sergeant!"

After a single cough, Johnson gave the female Elite what looked like a little smile. "What's up... Arby...?"

She returned the smile. "Stay with us, Sergeant. It is going to be alright! This is nothing for you!"

He was barely alive. John knew that. Katerina knew that. But the first thing the Chief said was, "I'm getting you out of here."

A few pained grunts and the fallen soldier told him, "No, you're... no, you're not." And then he clasped hands with the Spartan. "D-don't let her go. Don't ever let her go!"

Katerina glanced at John momentarily. Tears were already in her eyes at that point.

He clasped the Spartan's hand tighter as he coughed again. But he wanted to get these words out first. "Send me out... with a bang!" His head slumped lifelessly onto the Arbiter's lap.

"Oh no! no, no! Sergeant!" Katerina whimpered softly as she lowered her head to his to connect foreheads. "Not you!"

When the Chief let go of Johnson's hand, he found that Cortana's data chip was in his hand. Don't let her go. That was what he said.

So he stood up, walked over to the control panel and let Cortana into Halo's core. She was visibly upset as she looked down at Johnson. "Chief..." She wanted to say something comforting. But what? "I'm so sorry!"

The stoic Spartan said nothing.

And there was nothing he could say. So Cortana, with her eyes

closed, activated Halo.

John slide her data chip back into his helmet. By then, a large beam of light erupted from Halo's core, almost blinding Katerina, who was still on the ground with Johnson.

However, she knew there was no time to waste. She got to her feet and tugged at John's arm, who was watching the beam. "John, we have to go," He didn't move nor say anything. "Please, John, we have to go now!" She shook his arm harder this time.

He snapped out of whatever trance he was in upon his Elite companion's calls. She was right. They had to leave now.

So John slipped his hand into Katerina's, and they ran.

* * *

><p>AN: Ah, writer's block still kicking my butt. But I hope you like this chapter anyways
>

**For the next chapter onwards, it'll be within Glasslands' and Thursday War's timelines. We'll be catching up with the rest of Kate's family and perhaps some other things as well! **

**This story coming to an end pretty soon, so thank you guys for sticking with it for so long. :) **

45. Who Would Have Thought

**Halo â€" Katerina Duran - "Make It Last: Of Trust and Friendship" **

* * *

><p>Location: Duran Keep, State of Duran,
Sanghelios
December 25th, 2552
>

"Mother! Brother!"

"Darling!" Katerina Duran accepted her youngest daughter's flying hug as she and Darius were walking towards the gates of the Duran Keep. Almost the entire Keep were waiting in anticipation for their return after news of the Covenant's fall had reached Sanghelios.

But Ana was unable to wait until they would actually reach the gates. "I missed the both of you so much!"

"As did we, Ana," Katerina said, stroking her hair lovingly. "But do not worry. The Covenant is no more. We are free."

"Grandmother!"

"Oh, here come the boys!" Katerina was beaming at this point, pulling away from Ana to kneel down and receive a double hug from Ana's boys, Sal and Adas. "Hiiii! Oh, it is wonderful to see the both of

you!"

It was then that her fifth child walked up to them, but in an incredible slow pace that said she was feeling neutral about this return. "Hello, mother. Brother." She greeted them respectively. There wasn't much joy in her tone, even though she held a smile. "It is good to see you all safe and sound."

"It is good to _be _safe and sound, Melika," Katerina gave her a quick hug, while she was carrying Adas in one arm.

"Those bandages say otherwise, mother,"

"Are you alright, grandmother?" Adas, the youngest of the two, questioned with much concern.

The Arbiter gave a little nod, packaged with a little smile. "I am fine, dear. It is nothing to worry about," Glancing around, she realized she was missing someone else. "Where is Savos, Ana?"

"Back at home, mother. Making sure the house is decent enough for your return." She replied with a little cheeky smile.

"Oh?"

"Two young children live in the house. So help me."

"I will help you when _you _raise seven children."

* * *

><p>Location: Katerina's private chambers

Katerina felt so liberated to be out of that Arbiter armor. She was going to have to have it upgraded, especially that cloaking system. But the first thing she wanted to do was to somehow get rid of that ugly scar on her chest. The last thing she needed was a constant reminder of the last 30 years of her life.

The 5 tombstones in the backyard were more than enough.

She casted her gaze upwards to the night sky instead of the backyard, having enough of torturing herself. There was something else on her mind.

There were gentle knocks on her chamber's door. It was probably Darius, coming to check on her. "Come in!"

And she was right. "I came by to ask if you needed anything," He had his head through the door and he spotted his mother at the balcony, leaning over the railing.

She shook her head lightly. "Not at all, darling. I was just enjoying the night sky," She glanced up at the star-dotted sky once again. "It has been a _very _long time since I enjoyed something so mesmerizing."

"Well, you deserve it," He now walked in, shutting the door behind him. "After everything that has happened."

"Yes..." Her tone fell. "Everything..." She turned her body to him halfway, revealing a combat knife in one hand.

"Isn't that the Spartan's?"

"He told me to have it." She tapped it against the railing uncertainly.

Darius could easily see the wistfulness in her violet cat-like eyes. He walked up to her, leaned against the railing and then addressed her. "There was nothing you could have done for the both of them." She continued to look down at the combat knife. "Mother. The ship _split in half_. It was just bad luck."

"Of all the times his luck could have failed on him..." She murmured to herself, turning her head away.

"Luck is an unpredictable thing. Who would have thought."

"We might never see them again, Dar," She locked her eyes with him. "And that is what hurts the most."

* * *

><p>AN: Here's a little chapter describing Kate's return to her home!
>

**Fleightfire - Well, I wouldn't say that there will be a sequel. Let's just say that if I ever have some new ideas to add to the story (official and unofficial), I will post the chapters here. :)>I do, in fact, have an idea for a sequel, though I might or might not wait for Halo 5 to write it. Because I do hope that Thel returns in Halo 5 and I can switch things up from there. :)

46. The Knight In Green Armor

Halo **â€"**** Katerina Duran - "Make It Last: Of Trust and Friendship"**

* * *

><p>Location: Dining Hall, Duran Keep, State of Duran, Sanghelios
February 4th, 2553**

"What do you think, Dar?"

"Must I answer honestly, mother?"

"If it has to do with the future of our Keep, yes,"

An awkward, 2-second pause and Darius replied to his mother, who had returned from seeing her guests out. "I have a bad feeling about this."

A few days prior, Admiral Lord Hood had contacted Katerina about discussing a truce between the Humans and the Sangheili. Now, there was no way Katerina could speak for the whole race. After all, on one side, you had the Servants of the Abiding Truth, led by former Field

Master Avu Med 'Telcam, an order following pre-Covenant beliefs. And on the other side, there was the Covenant Remnant, led by Jul 'Mdama, who still followed the Covenant religion. Katerina would only speak for those in her State. Her State did not want war or violence. Her State wanted peace. 'Telca and 'Mdama were going to make that a little difficult.

But her State was growing every day. Her army was expanding. She just had to make sure to make the right choices so that other Sangheili would believe in her.

The meeting went smoothly, with she and Hood agreeing on a ceasefire, her inviting that doctor to visit the Sangheili historical sites and him inviting her to commemorate those who had fallen during this long warâ€| including the Master Chief.

John.

Just mentioning the Spartan made that perfect smile on Katerina's face fade away.

She couldn't say that it went _completely _smoothly though. She felt that way because of the company. Well, first, you had Admiral Lord Hood. Katerina already knew him; he's not all that bad.

Then there was a lone female, a Captain Osman. She did not say anything at all. She was just observing the whole meeting, the supposed end to a near 30-year war. A lot of thoughts, her own opinions, were probably running through her head.

Next, you had Corporal Beloi. Now _he _looked like he was ready to toss a combat knife or two at Katerina and Darius.

And lastly, Doctor Phillips. He was supposedly interested in the Sangheili culture. Katerina felt him clamping down on his enthusiasm, though. It prompted her to give him the invitation, in hopes that it could strengthen the ties between her State and the humans.

But she also knew for a fact that some Sangheili living in her State do not like humans at all, and that some humans do not like the Sangheili at all. _The Corporal is probably an example_, she thought to herself.

Katerina flashed her firstborn a sweet smile. "Darling, I am afraid I am going to need more than a 'bad feeling',"

"I do not trust them. Something just doesn't feel right to me."

"Does your gut tell you that?"

"Yes,"

"Then we will be much more vigilant," She concluded. She had the combat knife in a holster secured around her waist. She removed the whole holster and placed it on the dining table next to her son. "Iâ€| understand that you feel this way. After all, just because we ever _never _in favor of the Covenant, it does not mean every human in the world trusts us."

"I just wish you had not given that doctor the offer of coming into our Keep," He said with soften eyes.

"A way to show we can be trusted," She kept her eyes on the combat knife while it was still in the holster. "I trust the Admiral. But rest assured, Dar, I am not stupid," She pulled out the knife from its holster and brought it up to her face. "Not anymore. If anyone tries to misuse my trust, I will simply remind them of the fate that had awaited Tartarus." She watched her own reflection on the blade of the combat knife.

Darius almost winced at that declaration. "Is thereâ€| a reason for this hostility, mother?"

Upon hearing that, she put down the knife instantly. Turning her body to him, she smiled once again. "No, dearest boy. I am justâ€| angry with so many things, past and present. I did not mean to scare you."

He returned the smile. "You did not, mother. I am just concerned, that's all."

"You have always done an amazing job taking care of me," Her smile grew into a grin as she ran her hands up his jaws. "Everything you have done so far, everything you have fought for, everything you have enduredâ€| your father would be _so _proud of you."

He held her wrists in a soft grapple. "I would like to think so, mother."

* * *

><p>Location: Backyard

The evening was finally tuning in. As the sun set, it was ever slowly disappearing into an array of crimson and orange. Katerina let go of a much needed sigh as she made herself a little more comfortable while she sat under the large tree in her backyard. Even after that terrible day, this tree still managed to stand strong. And it was more beautiful than ever.

One too many things were running through the female Elite's mind. She wanted to tackle them all. Or none, if it was possible. She was hoping that the gentle breeze grazing against her skin could take her away, even if it was just for a little while.

"Grandmother!"

She always felt immediate joy every time she picked up that tone. "Sal! Adas!" She caught them as they gave her a flying-tackle hug. "Got you! Come, join me."

Sal sat on Katerina's left and Adas sat on her right. She wrapped her arms around them and held them close. She was so thankful to have them in her life.

"We saw you under the tree and thought you might want some company," Sal said.

"Well, how can I resist the company of the two of you?" She was

practically beaming. She felt so warm inside.

"Grandmother," Adas called for her. "You must have had quite the adventure!"

"That I did, little one," She nodded.

"Do you have any interesting stories?"

"Yes, please, grandmother, tell us a story!"

A hearty laugh escaped her throat. "But it not even bedtime yet, darlings!"

"It is okay!" They said in unison.

Such sweethearts. How could she resist them? "Alright then. I will tell you two a story."

"What is it about, grandmother?" Adas asked as innocently as he could.

"The knight in green armor."

47. Letting Go

****Halo ****â€"**** Katerina Duran - "Make It Last: Of Trust and Friendship"****

*** * ***

**><p>Location: Dining Hall, Duran Keep, State of Duran, Sanghelios
February 11th, 2553****

"Mother, may we speak for a while?"

One could not blame Katerina when she widened her eyes after hearing that. Melika wanted to _talk _to her? Seriously? For as long as she could remember, Melika would take this attitude with her mother that Katerina never understood. It was like she hated everything in the world, even more so Katerina.

Katerina sat down her data pad on the dining table. "Oh! But of course, darling! Please sit down," She motioned for her to take the seat opposite her. "I must say that this is a surprise. I cannot remember the last time we had a talk."

Melika kept her stern mask as she spoke. "A very long time. I might have been just a child back then."

It was definitely a very long time ago. "So tell me. What can I do for my darling?"

"Simple. You can let me go."

She knitted her eyebrows together. "I am sorry, darling?"

Melika leaned in a little closer. "You can let me go."

"Let you go where?"

"I wish to leave the Keep, mother."

"_Leave _the Keep?" Her daughter was not making any sense at all.
"Melika, what are you talking about?"

Melika pulled a face that said she was done with this and ready to say everything she wanted to say. "Let me keep this short. For years now, I have been in contact with the most amazing Sangheili I have ever met. He is charming, strong, and loves me very much. He is from the Moro Keep, in the State of Mdama. I wish to leave this place and be with him, where I belong."

Katerina's heart began to beat like a drum at that as she attempted to catch her breath. "Stateâ€¦ of _Mdama_?!"

Melika kept her hands on her thighs and continued to address her mother in her calm and strict manner. "Now, if you are concerned that I will give all of your battle plans and strategies and all that other nonsense to Jul 'Mdama, do not worry. I know absolutely nothing because I have never ever _cared_."

"THAT is _not _my concern right now!" She raised her voice but almost immediately clamped down on the volume. "Are you aware that the State of Mdama practices the Covenant religion and the original Sangheili customs?"

"Yes, I am," She crossed her arms across her chest. "And it does not bother me one bit. I will be willing to handle anything if it means getting away from _you_!"

Silence had a grip on her at that moment. "â€¦ What?"

"You have caused me _enough _pain and suffering, mother! I want out of it all!" She got o her feet instantly. Melika had no more intention of being serene anymore. It was time to let loose. "If you had not said what you said to the Prophets, my father and siblings would _still be here_! But they are not, because of you! Because you _caused _their deaths!" Then she paused to give a faked laugh. "And do _not _even get me started on Versera. It was only a matter of time before you would kill someone in your family _by your own hands_."

Her words were causing so much pain to Katerina. Tears immediately grouped in her eyes, threatening to fall. "Versera had been _infected_! I could not leave him that way! He would have killed me as well!"

"You should have let him!"

A thousand stinging knives to the Arbiter's heart.

"As I grew up and began to understand, I never had peace ever again. But maybe I will nowâ€¦"

After a brief struggle, Katerina swallowed that painful lump in her throat. "Your children will never know their true fatherâ€¦" She somehow managed to get that statement out.

"Let me worry with that," She moved away from the dining table to walk out of the room. However, she stopped at the doorway to say, "I am leaving tonight. I will say my goodbyes to brother and Ana and the little ones. I can tell you that my goodbyes to them will be much more peaceful. I never hated them, after all."

And she left the Arbiter alone to sob soundlessly to herself.

* * *

><p>Location: Katerina's private chambers
Later that night**

Katerina's eyes already hurt from crying so much. While she felt that she had no more tears, they somehow found a way to stream down her chiseled cheeks. She continued to fix her gaze on the five headstones in the backyard down below, lamenting.

Darius did not even think to knock this time. He almost broke down the door. "Mother! Mother, what is this about Melika leaving for the State of Mdama, of all places?!"

She continued to keep her back to her firstborn. "I am sure Melika told you about her love. If she wants to be happy, let her be."

"But-but this is unacceptable! WHAT is she thinking?!" He met up with her at the balcony.

"Her happiness is more important to her, Dar. Let it be."

His mother's current attitude was confusing him greatly. But he could only come to one conclusion. "Mother," Darius took her hands. "What did she say to you?"

A faked smile formed on her lips. "Things that I have heard many times over these years. But somehowâ€¦ hearing it from your own child just makes it all the more worse."

"Oh, motherâ€¦" He knew where she was driving that.

"I am sure a part of you must hate me, Dar? For the fate I have given this family?"

"What? No! No, never!" He pulled her into a hug at that and patted her back. "How can you even think that? You are my darling mother, the one who gave me life. Nothing you do can ever make me hate you, because you are absolutely flawless. Everything you have done thus far was to ensure our safety. If you are guilty of anything, you are only guilty of making sure we all lived."

She hung onto him as tightly as she could. "I do not deserve to have such a beautiful son like you."

"I do not deserve have a beautiful mother like you, but here we are," He said with a warm smile and pulled back. "I am here. Ana is here. Her husband and the little ones are here. We are here because we love you with all our hearts."

Katerina could only smile her thanks. She was out of tears at this

point. "Now, I am sure Ana must be heartbroken,"

"She is devastated, mother."

She gave him another smile. "Then go be with her, Dar. She needs you more than I do. You can let me be."

"You are certain?"

"Positive."

Darius did as his mother wished and left the balcony and her room. While he made her feel slightly better, it was going to take a while to heal this new scar. Correction: it might never heal. Those scars from 30 years ago healed because Katerina put John's combat knife through Truth multiple times. _How _was she going to get over this?

So when she turned back to the world in front of her, she did not glance down at the tombstones, she instead she glanced up at the jet-black skies where a million or more silver stars sparkled like diamonds. Fixing her gaze upwards, this was what she thought to herself:

John. My companion, my friend. How I could use your guidance right about now.

* * *

><p>AN: Hey, guys! So... the next chapter is going to be the last chapter of this story. I actually wanted to end this story on chapter 50, but can't really think of anything else I'd like to put in.**

**So chappie 48 will be the last chappie, and chappie 49 will be Katerina's biography and story trivia! After which, subsequent chapters after 49 will be new chapters, either canon or non-canon (based on this story). :)>

48. It's Okay

Halo **â€œ**** Katerina Duran - "Make It Last: Of Trust and Friendship"**

* * *

><p>Location: Vehicle Zone, UNSC Infinity
July 23****rd****, 2557**

"I can give you over forty thousand reasons why I know that sun isn't real. I know because the emitter's Rayleigh effect is disproportionate to its suggested size. I know it because its stellar cycle is more symmetrical than an actual star. But for all that? I'll never actually know if it looks real. If it _feels_ real..."

Cortana almost sounded uncertain of herself as she turned around to the man standing behind her, loading his Assault Rifle. "Before this is all over, promise me you'll figure out which one of us is the

machine."

So much wistfulness in the way she said it. _What can I say to that? No one here is a machine. Why won't she get that? _The Master Chief looked away and back to his Assault Rifle instead.

He needed to change the subject.

Something else _had_ been running through his head all this while. He even dreamt of it during these 4 years. "You think Kate is alive?"

Well, this was the first time he's mentioned her since he woke up. Cortana was waiting for it, in fact. "It'sâ€| hard to say, Chief. I mean, the ship split in half."

"But the portal would have taken us to Earth. There's a chance she made it, right?"

She held a sorrowful smile. "Chiefâ€| We made it through the portal. But look where we ended up."

She was right.

"But don't forget what you told me about her. If she's avoided death for so long, then that was probably nothing. She's probably back home with her kids,"

The Spartan ran his hand up the empty knife holster attached to his upper left arm. "I sure hope so." After all, Katerina's children needed their mother and her grandchildren needed their grandmother.

And to him, it would be nice to not lose another person close to him.

* * *

><p>Location: Observation Deck, UNSC Infinity
August 2nd, 2557**

_Which one of us is the machine? I can tell you one thing. _You _were never the machine. Not in this lifetime. Being a machine means having no feelings or heart or anything. With what you did? You're more human than I'll ever be. _

John then heard the sound of boots connecting with the floor. It got louder and louder and then it stopped. It was probably Captain Lasky, coming to check on him or some other officer. However, before he could tear his gaze away from Earth below him and turn around, the person called out for him in a meek tone.

"John?"

Whenever things shocked him greatly, he taught himself not to let his jaw drop. That was not possible this time, however. He spun around instantly.

She stood at the doorway of the observation deck with her violet cat-like eyes, the jet-black waist-length hair, the silver shawl

draped over her Arbiter armor and the combat knife, _his _combat knife, attached to her hip.

"Kateâ€|" Rendered speechless. He could not believe it â€" his Elite companion was alive! She didn't leave him! She was okay!

Katerina did not wait for an invitation to walk in; she knew he was too much in astonishment to say it. Her fingers were intertwined with each other and she also had a beaming smile on her face as she walked in and up to him.

"You're okay," Any softer than she would not have been able to catch it.

"Yes, I am! Did you expect otherwise, my boy?" She stood in front of him. "Do I not get a hug? I was under the impression that we had already passed that stage."

He would have hugged her until she couldn't breathe if only shock hadn't had a tight grip on him. He smiled, and wrapped his arms around her.

It was so much easier to hug him now that he was out of his armor; he was not too tall for her. She made sure she gave him a big mama bear-hug. "It is _so _good to see you, John,"

"Likewise, Kate," He pulled back but still kept his arms around her and her hands slid down to his chest. "You look amazing."

"Thank you so much, John. Come," She took his hands. "Let us sit."

They sat down in front of each other, much like the time they were in the observation deck onboard the _Dawn_. "Tell me, Katie, how's your homeworld? Your kids?"

"They are all fine, as well as Ana's boys," Her smile suppressed into a smaller one. "The same could not be said for Melika, however."

This felt a little serious to him. "What do you mean?"

She lowered her head in sadness. "She left the Keep, John. To be with some other Sangheili in the State of Mdamâ€" a state that still practiced the Covenant religion."

"You're kidding," How much more was going to happen to this Elite? It was just not fair.

"If her happiness laid over there, John, who am I to stop her? Yes, her words cut me butâ€| if she wishes to never see my face again, then so be it."

Instinctively, he ran one hand up her back to comfort. "She'll realize her mistake one day, Kate."

She wanted to change the subject so badly. So she waited a few seconds before saying, "I cannot tell you how much I have missed you. I cannot tell you how guilty I felt being the only one making it back to Earth. You andâ€| Cortana were presumed dead. I refused to believe

it."

"Wellâ€¦ I'm afraid that one of us didn't make it today, Katie."

Katerina knew exactly what he was talking about. She ran one hand up his cheek. "I know, dear boy, I know. You need not explain and hurt yourself. Lord Hood told me everything."

"I could have done something, you know," He caught her gaze. "It wasn't her time. It was just too soon."

"I know you are crushed, John. I cannot imagine how you feel. But you must not agonize over this. Do you not remember what I told you after you recused me?" She leaned in and cupped both of his cheeks. "Remember Cortana as she had lived. Please, John, you cannot fade away like this."

"Kate," He gave her a small smile. "You can't say that you can't imagine how I feel. You lost a lot, just like me. If anything, you understand me completely. I know what you're trying to do; it's what I did for you 4 years ago. But don't. Don't do it. Justâ€¦ let me dwell." And he let his head hang.

"I understand that you want to let it all go, but if you do, I am afraid you will get lost," She gripped his lower arms this time. "You get lost in a very deep, dark place, John, and it takes forever to get out of it, believe me. You must find a way to stay strong. Please let me help you. I will do whatever it takes. You are like a son to me. I will not let you turn into a ghost or â€¦ a machine."

That prompted him to lift his head up and meet her eyes. Machine. "Katieâ€¦ between Cortana and meâ€¦ who-who did you think was the machine?"

She furrowed her eyebrows at that. "Oh, what do you speak of, dear boy? None of you were a machine. A machine does everything it is asked of, without any question, with no feelings whatsoever. How could any of you be the machine?"

John absolutely had no reply to that. He just didn't know what to say anymore. And Katerina was out of things to say.

So she got to her feet and gently pulled his head into her chest. "It is okay, John," She whispered as she ran her fingers through his short wavy brown hair. "It is going to be okay."

He wasn't sure about okay anymore, but he was sure that one of his friends was still here and wasn't going to leave him for a long, long time. So he wrapped his arms around her, and silently thanked Katerina for being here.

* * *

><p>AN: Well, that's that, guys! Thank you SO much for reading this story! I hope you all liked it! :)**

**If you are interested, I have a few more Halo fics located in my profile that you can always read, and I also have some waiting to be

written. Thanks for reading!**

**Much love,
>Ash. ;)

49. Biographies and Trivia

**Full Name: **Katerina Duran
>Nickname(s): Kate, Katie, Arby, Kitty-Kat

>Gender: Female
>Date of Birth: December 12th, 2485
>Place of Birth: Velam Keep, State of Velam,
Sanghelios
>Current Residence: Duran Keep, State of Duran,
Sanghelios

**Hair Color: **Black (Glossy)
>Hair Style: Waist length with right-sided fringe

>Eye Color: Violet (Cat-like)**
>Skin Color: Navy Blue
>Height: 6 foot

**Attire: **Arbiter armor, silver scarf

**Rank(s): **Supreme Commander (Formerly)
>Arbiter
Kaidon of Duran Keep

**Weapon(s): **Twin Energy Swords, Twin Plasma Rifles, Twin wrist
blades, Twin Magnums

**Equipment(s): **Active Camouflage, Plasma Grenades, Fragmentation
Grenades

**Associates: **John-117 (Close friend, companion)
>Sgt. Johnson (Friend, companion)
Lord Terrence Hood

**Katerina's Family!
>Name: Micah Duran (Husband)
>Gender: Male
>Current Status: Deceased (During the annihilation of
the State of Duran)
>Date of Birth: January 26th, 2483**
>Date of Death: November 18th, 2523

**Name: **Darius
>Gender: Male**
>Current Status: Alive**
>Date of Birth: February 10th, 2503

**Name: **Lessa
>Gender: Female**
>Current Status: Deceased (During the annihilation of the
State of Duran)
>Date of Birth: May 19th, 2506
>Date of Death: November 18th, 2523

**Name: **Rho

>Gender: Male
>Current Status: Deceased (During the annihilation of the State of Duran)**
>Date of Birth: October 21st, 2510
>Date of Death: November 18th, 2523

****Name: **Rernak****

>Gender: Male
>Current Status: Deceased (During the annihilation of the State of Duran)
>Date of Birth: October 21st, 2510**
>Date of Death: November 18th, 2523

****Name: **Melika****

>Gender: Female
>Current Status: Alive
>Date of Birth: November 11th, 2512

****Name: **Versera**

>Gender: Male
>Current Status: Deceased (Infected on board the Pillar of Autumn)**
>Date of Birth: June 15th, 2516**
>Date of Death: September 22, 2552

****Name: **Ana**

>Gender: Female**
>Current Status: Alive
>Date of Birth: September 3rd, 2519

* * *

><p>Story Trivia:
****1)** The title of Chapter 34, "Master of Disaster" was named after the song "Master of Disaster" by Seether.

2) Originally, Katerina was going to meet Micah while on her way to the State of Duran, instead of sending him a letter first.

50. Loyalty

****Location: Bridge of **_**The Diary of Oath**_** (Katerina's Assault Carrier)**
>May 2558

I began to make my way to the bridge of _The Diary of Oath_. This assault carrier was my pride and joy, still standing (or in this case, floating in space) after all this time. It was ripped away from me after the damned Prophets had stripped me of my rank.

And now to have it back, it certainly warmed my heart.

Not too long ago, I had been contacted by a Spartan, although he was not the Spartan I had been hoping for. This Spartan â€" his name was Locke, and he had requested my presence, going as far as to suggest having the meeting at my convenience.

That spoke volumes to me. It meant that he required something from me. Something I supposed only _I _could provide him with.

Well, he must be truly desperate to have come to me - a Sangheili.

I was well aware that not all of the Humans were as trustworthy of me as Admiral Hood or Sergeant Johnson or Captain Lasky were.

Or John.

My companion.

My _friend_.

For 4 years, I had convinced myself that watching him pull himself back into the rear of the frigate, _Forward Unto Dawn_, would be my last memory of him. Thankfully, it was not. John had been found, alive, and after losing his AI companion, Cortana, returned to the UNSC _Infinity_. _Admiral Hood personally contacted me to inform me of this development.

As I listened to the holographic message he had sent, I was unable to control my tears of happiness.

I left for the _Infinity_ as quickly as I possibly could and reunited with John.

We spoke quite a bit; the poor boy was visibly still in grief over Cortana's death. I comforted him the best I could and did not leave his side for the next few days. I even met his beloved Blue Team â€" Fred, Kelly and Linda. I could tell that they followed John fiercely, trusted his judgement - trusted him. Hence, they did not kill me right then and there. It was soon time for me to return to Sangheilios as I still had several civil matters to attend to.

And that â€" _that _was the last time I ever saw him. Physically.

Whenever I visited the _Infinity_ on diplomatic matters, I made it a point to ask about John. I would be told whatever anybody knew.

There was no further communications, nothing, even though he said he would try.

At least he did not make it a promise.

Shaking away all those thoughts, I finally made it to the bridge.

"I do not trust you. _She_ may... but I do not."

Oh, Dar. I do not blame you â€" you have always been passionately loyal to me. You would never want anything to happen to me. You nearly lost your mind when I returned to Earth with those bandages on me.

"Noted." I heard a voice return. I believed him to be the Spartan responsible for this assembly.

It was time for me to keep my eldest son from jumping on the Spartan. "My firstborn's trust is not the issue today, Spartan Locke."

Locke, his own team of Spartans and Darius turned their heads to me, with Dar taking his place at my side. "Mother." He greeted me.

I gave him a nod and put my gaze on the Spartan in the silver armor. "I may respect the Spartans, but it is still my trust you must earn. I am Katerina Duran," I held out my hand to him, much to his surprise. I suppose he was not used to aliens providing such formalities. "The Arbiter."

Locke nodded at me and took my hand in a firm grip, careful not to crush it. "Arbiter."

"It is nice to meet you in person," I said. "You wereâ€| rather adamant about seeing me."

"Well, this _is_ important."

_How _do I figure this man out? "You are a hunter, yes? A seeker of things."

Locke lifted his shoulders just a little. "That's not the official job title, but it's close enough."

I tilted my head at him, hoping to put in more emphasis to my next question. "And now you hunt other Spartans?"

He removed a tiny pad capable of projecting images from his left thigh and presented it to me. "I'm not so much hunting _a_ Spartan as I am hunting _the_ Spartan."

A single image popped up â€" and it was of a bulky Spartan. My heart almost stopped and my violet eyes were glued to it. "You seek..."

Locke deactivated the hologram, prompting me to glance up at him. "117."

"I was not told the identity of your prey." I managed to get out.

"That is why I am sharing it with you now. We are talking about trust, after all." He retorted.

Suddenly it all made sense to me â€" why he had requested to meet me. "Ah. So you think I know where he is?"

"I know you don't."

Really, now? "Oh?"

"I've determined that there have been no communications between you and the Master Chief for the past year. So you can't possibly know where he is."

He said that in a way that showed he was not too sure about it, but he was giving me the benefit of the doubt. "You are correct. I last saw him on board the UNSC _Infinity_ about a year ago."

"That was what I was told, Arbiter," After which, Locke took a quick glance at Darius and then at my Elite Majors who were present at the

bridge. "May I ask you something?"

"Please."

"Your people used to call him 'Demon.' Was that an insult or a compliment?"

I smiled warmly at that, memories of our time together coming to me all at once. "I personally never called him that. After all, I have never considered him my enemy. I have nothing but respect for you Humans, including the Spartans. But it is meant to be an insult. But one with a modicum of respect."

"So I see."

Time to get to the point. "So what is it exactly you require of me, Spartan Locke?"

"Information," He admitted. "You two worked together during the end of the Human-Covenant war."

"The events which forged this bond were... complicated, yes, but I managed to earn this trust," I said. "What about the time we worked together?"

"What kind of man was he?"

Ah. So Locke wanted to know from first-hand of the Master Chief's character from a former ally during the most crucial times of a war. "In the short time I've known him, I have grown to discover that he is a man fiercely dedicated to the UNSC. Male humans and male Sangheili are not so different, it seems." I quipped, trying to read him through his visor that glowed a gorgeous blue.

"So it seems," He was intrigued by my reply. "You've observed him well."

"As a silent prisoner of the Covenant for 30 years, one's perception tends to develop exceptionally." In the midst of it all, I realized the whole reason why he was here. Narrowing my eyes at him, I asked, "You are hunting John? Does this mean he is missing?"

"So it seems, Arbiter. The Master Chief has gone AWOL and I'm tasked with finding him and bringing him home."

This was sounding all too serious to me and I did not like it one bit. "He would not just disappear, Spartan Locke. He must be in trouble."

"You sound sure of yourself, Arbiter."

"As sure as I will ever be."

"Did you know him on a personal level?"

He had me right there. "Actually? no," I revealed to him. It was the truth, after all. "He knows of my horrid past but I? I never truly got to know him all that well. All I can tell you is that he treats me with much kindness and respect, as if I were one of his own." My heart was starting to ache just a little. The thought of my

friend getting involved in something completely over his head frightened me.

I would often wonder why I would grow so concerned over a man whom I've known for only a few month, though have observed him for several years, him and his Spartans.

Then I would remember that he saved me from a Flood Combat Form and listened patiently as I related my story to him, after which he promised to help me in my hunt for the Prophet of Truth.

A pause and he proceeded to ask me the question he had been wanting to inquire about since he arrived here. "And do you think he would end up being a traitor?"

I took in a nice deep breath before giving my answer. "Everyone has their reasons for doing the unthinkable. Some are blinded, some are ruthless and some feel like it is the only way they will be heard."

"And which do you think he falls under?"

Only one. "John will do what is necessary to save the world."

Locke was pleasantly surprised with my answer and I knew that for sure.

"Spartan Locke," I continued. "If you wish to understand the entity that is the legendary Spartan, that is humanity's savior, then you must speak with those who have known him far greater than I have â€" his own Spartans."

Locke turned his head away just a little bit. "I would if they haven't gone and disappeared with him."

I widened my eyes at him upon hearing that. "So this is a lot bigger than you perceive it to be."

"I'm trying to put an end it, however, which is why I'm here. I would appreciate your help, Arbiter."

I wanted to trust Spartan Locke. Believe me, I really did. However, not all Humans were like John and willing to put aside everything to even remotely _think _of trusting me. So Locke could not trust me and I could not trust him.

However, we had one thing is common â€" John.

I was willing to put aside my feelings for the Spartan standing in front of me for the sake and well-being of my companion.

"If you do find him, Spartan Lockeâ€" will you kill him?"

He gave it a thought before answering. "Only if it comes to that."

That was more than enough for me. I will assist you in finding John, Spartan Locke, so that that may never happen. No one else has to die.

One thing was for sure, however: the next time I would see John, I will slap the ever-loving hell out of him for disappearing like that and getting himself into trouble, as well as not trying to inform me.

What can I say? I am unreasonable like that.

* * *

><p>AN: Here's a little something I've been wanting to do since the release of Halo 2: Anniversary! Hope you like! :)

>

End
file.